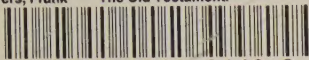


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# THE OLD TESTAMENT

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# INTRODUCTION

Today the ancient cities of Nineveh, Tyre, and Babylon exist principally in the minds of archaeologists who dig among their potsherds. Once-mighty Philistia is all but forgotten, and modern Egypt is busily drowning the relics of her great antiquity. Gone also is most material evidence of the Hebrew Empire that lived so briefly. Yet living on is the Hebrew record of facts, imaginations, ecstasies, and agonies of the men who endured the world conquerors from Egypt, Babylonia, Assyria, and Greece. This record we call the Old Testament, and it is a living proof to the belief that the literary art survives all other of men's endeavors.

Study of the Old Testament is today somewhat in eclipse. It has been shunned by secular schools that foolishly fear releasing a variety of prejudices if they teach it, neglected by Sunday Schools too busy applying its ethical principles to the problems of contemporary living, discredited by the sciences which have challenged a literal interpretation, and set aside by those who, in a day of easy entertainment, consider it too difficult. Yet the Bible remains a bestseller and a treasure trove for the writer struggling to make clear his meaning by allusion.

A very practical reason for studying the Old Testament is its wealth of vocabulary. Our language has been enriched for centuries by words and expressions that have taken their meaning from their usage in the Bible. Our poets, dramatists, and prose writers continue to use these expressions and to mine Biblical lines for their own precise meanings. Less practical, perhaps, but infinitely more rewarding is the stuff of the Old Testament itself. The Greek word "Bible" signifies a collection of books, and the Bible is a library unto itself. One writer has compared it to an anthology. In its pages are heroic, degenerate, serious, and comic characters. It contains stories of high dramatic value. As history, it reads more easily than longer, more carefully documented efforts. As philosophy, it attempts to account for man's existence, purpose, and suffering. As ethics, it pro-



vides the backbone of Western thinking. Like any anthology it is inconsistent. The reader will discover not one, but several, points of view representing widely divergent ideas.

This inconsistency is partly responsible for difficulty encountered in reading the Bible. The reader who approaches the Bible expecting to find a single point of view and style will be defeated before he finishes two chapters of Genesis. For this reason, this study guide offers some help as to the authorship and reason for the various writings. With this help, a first reading of the Old Testament may be a fuller and more enjoyable experience.

A second difficulty in reading the Bible is its language. This guide uses as its source the Authorized, or King James, Translation into English because it is the literary Bible, the one from which nearly all the store of common allusion is derived. The Authorized Version (called this because James I of Great Britain gave it official sanction) was completed in the seventeenth century before the death of Shakespeare and is in the language used by the greatest of English writers. Just as we must at first study Shakespeare's language to appreciate fully his plays, so we must at first study the Authorized Translation of the Bible. Once familiar with the language, we can read the Bible easily with little outside help.

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE OLD TESTAMENT**

The pre-history of the Jews is often spoken of as the Age of the Patriarchs: Abraham, Jacob, Isaac renamed Israel, and Joseph. About two thousand years before Christ, a Semitic people whom the Egyptians called the Habiru began a lengthy migration from the southern part of the Tigris and Euphrates valleys. They apparently journeyed to the northern extremity of the Fertile Crescent,\* and then turned down its western edge until they came to Canaan, a well-watered land already settled by a people of advanced culture. Among other groups of Semitic nomads, the Habiru may have had the distinguishing feature of worshipping a single god instead of the many gods preferred by their neighbors.

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\*This was the arc of fertile land beginning at the Persian Gulf, extending northwest along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, and then southwest to the Mediterranean coastal plain.



Then because of a drought and famine, some of the nomads wandered into the delta of the Nile in Egypt, perhaps around 1750 B.C. There they found sanctuary under the friendly Hyksos kings. These would have been the Joseph tribes. Between 1300-1250 B.C., the new pharaohs who had overthrown the Hyksos kings saw the tribes as a threat to their authority and they began the enslavement that terminated in the Exodus led by Moses. The tribes wandered in the wilderness of the peninsula of Sinai and finally camped at Kadesh for a long period, until they felt themselves strong enough to attempt the conquest of the highly civilized, prosperous, and strongly defended Canaanite cities.

The period between the Exodus from Egypt and the establishment of Saul's kingdom around 1030 B.C. witnessed the gradual conquest of Canaan. The Joseph tribes probably allied themselves with other Hebrew tribes that had not gone into Egypt, and their similar religious beliefs may have been the main strength of that alliance. During the period of conquests under Joshua and the Judges, the tribes were joined in a loose confederation. The presence of a new, strong enemy—the Philistines—encouraged closer political unity, and after Saul dramatically defeated this new enemy, he was recognized as king of the united tribes. Saul's success was marred by his jealousy of a popular young hero from Judah, David; and before long, David lost favor at court despite his close friendship with the king's son Jonathan and his marriage to Saul's daughter Michal.

Forced to flee, David was a hunted rebel for several years and eventually settled in Philistine territory until Saul's death, when he was acknowledged King of Judah. With the help of his general Joab, David subdued Saul's son, united the two kingdoms, and built a small empire that extended from Damascus to the frontiers, over an area slightly larger than the state of Vermont. He captured the stronghold of Jerusalem from the Jebusites and made the city his capital because of its militarily and politically strategic location. David was succeeded by his son Solomon who built the Temple in Jerusalem and increased the kingdom's wealth, though he lost control over the northern province of Syria. Upon Solomon's death about 936 B.C., the kingdom was divided when his son Rehoboam refused to accede to the Northern tribes' demand for less taxation. Jeroboam I became king of Israel, the North, and its capital city eventually was Samaria; Rehoboam reigned over Judah, the South, and his

capital remained Jerusalem.

THE DIVIDED KINGDOMS. The separate kingdoms of Judah and Israel continued a precarious historical course, the position of Israel being particularly perilous. It bordered the powerful enemy state of Syria, with which it was perennially at war. It lay in the path of powerful Assyria, which was determined to conquer the world. In addition, Israel was the richer of the two kingdoms, and its wealth brought it religious problems. Its citizenry, when complacent, tended to forget their origins and their single God; when in trouble they tried to appease not only their God but the baalim (local deities) of their neighbors. Both Judah and Israel were surrounded by states worshipping exotic gods. Some gods demanded human sacrifice, a practice the Judaist prophets were condemning as late as the fall of Jerusalem; most demanded sacrifice to a graven idol, a practice condemned early in the Mosaic code. As political and economic problems multiplied, the children of Israel turned more and more to foreign gods, apparently in the belief that their own God had failed them.

It was this sort of backsliding that called forth the denunciations by the prophets, first Elijah, who thundered against Jezebel and her worship of baalim, and then Elisha. The first of the writing prophets was Amos, about 750 B.C. This was a time of prosperity and peace in Israel, but the people were enslaving their own countrymen, oppressing the poor, ostentatiously sacrificing to their God at Bethel and then serving other gods in their homes. Amos, the first identified writer in the Old Testament, warned the people that they would be destroyed because of their sins. Hosea, who followed him, accurately predicted the source of their destruction, Assyria. The Assyrian threat materialized, and after a lengthy siege Samaria, capital of Israel, fell to Sargon's hordes in 721 B.C. Thousands of Israelites were deported to different lands, and Israel became the Ten Lost Tribes.

The message of Amos and Hosea to Israel was not lost in Judah. In the same century, Micah and the First Isaiah predicted a similar fate for the Southern Kingdom unless it reformed at once. Judah was now vassal to Assyria and had lost many of its cities. Jerusalem itself was besieged and was saved only when a plague miraculously decimated Sennacherib's army. With First Isaiah and Micah we sense a prophetic resignation to their coun-

try's place in history. Surrounded by nations far more powerful, Judah could scarcely hope for political equality. The growing realization that the conquering nations, with whom God had made no covenant, behaved more wickedly than the Jews and still prevailed caused pessimism among the prophets but never a rejection of their belief in God. First Isaiah foresaw a remnant of good people surviving all disasters and a delayed judgment wherein the wicked would be condemned and the good finally rewarded. He envisioned a perfect king, one whose name "shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." Such Messianic prophecies continued to console prophets and people in the troubled centuries to come.

Despite the prophets, the kingdom of Judah ran a devious course. Isaiah himself, according to legend, was martyred under the evil Manasseh, whose iniquities were followed by his son Amon. During the long reign of these two kings religion was suppressed. However, a book was "discovered" in the Temple in 621 B.C. during the reign of the good king Josiah, the Book of Deuteronomy containing the commandments given by God to Moses. Josiah instituted sweeping reforms based upon the new book, the Assyrian Empire was crushed by the Babylonians, and for a time good seemed triumphant.

THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY. Prophesying at this time in Judah were Jeremiah, Nahum, Zephaniah, and Habakkuk; and they soon found little to reassure them. The Scythians threatened invasion from the north; the long-quiet empire of Egypt was newly stirred to thoughts of world empire, and Josiah was killed in battle with the Egyptians. Equally menacing was the threat of the Babylonians, who were following the same policies as had the Assyrians. Josiah's defeat was followed by a puppet government subservient to Egypt; then Egypt, allied with Assyria, fell to the Babylonians at Carchemish. Now vassal to Babylonia, King Jehoiakim of Judah withheld his tribute and provoked an attack by Nebuchadnezzar, who took Jerusalem in 597 B.C. He carried many captives into Babylon, including the king, but left Zedekiah as his puppet ruler. Despite the prophet Jeremiah's counsel to save the city by remaining a quiet vassal, Zedekiah intrigued with Egypt and incited a second Babylonian invasion. Jerusalem fell again in 586 B.C., the Temple was razed, the city destroyed, and many of the remaining people were carried into



Babylonia. The Diaspora had begun.

The half century of Babylonian captivity was not without its advantages. So attractive and so rich was the land of Babylon that many of the captive Jews stayed on. Yet their religion remained with them, mainly because the two prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel declared that it was possible for the Jews to worship their God any place in the world, not only at the Temple in Jerusalem. Part of Ezekiel's book was an optimistic plan for righteously governing the rebuilt city of Jerusalem, and his faith in the exiles' eventual return helped the captives through a trying time. Ezekiel and Ezra, who instituted strict laws when the captivity had ended, were responsible for historical Judaism. The prophet Second Isaiah was in exile at the time Cyrus of Persia defeated the Babylonians and allowed the Jews to return to their homeland. His writings carried to completion the visions of the earlier prophets. For Isaiah, God was the God of all nations, the author of evil as well as good, and therefore truly monotheistic. He had chosen the Jews as his people not for temporal power but to carry his spiritual message to all the nations of the world. Second Isaiah envisioned a Messianic day when "the Gentiles shall come to thy Light" and hoped for a resurrection of the dead.

From 538 to 320 B.C. Judah remained a theocratic state almost unknown to the rest of the world. A province of Persia, it fell too when the Persian Empire succumbed to the power of Alexander of Macedonian Greece. Jerusalem was taken, ironically on the Sabbath, by Alexander's General Ptolemy I in 320 B.C. Upon Alexander's death, the Ptolemies made Palestine a province of their empire with its center at Alexandria. During this period the Septuagint, the first translation of the Old Testament, was completed. Alexandrian Jews translated the books from Hebrew into Greek, making it possible for the Jews of the Diaspora, who were forgetting Hebrew, to read the Old Testament in the language known to all educated people of the time.

In 198 B.C. the Seleucids of Syria wrested Palestine from the Ptolemies. Within twenty years the Seleucid Antiochus Epiphanes came to power and began a persecution of the Jews. A devotee of Hellenistic culture, Antiochus attempted to stamp out Judaism and substitute Greek thought and gods. Those refusing to honor the Greek gods were ruthlessly persecuted and put to death. Under the Maccabees, the Jews revolted, defeated



the Seleucids, and enjoyed a brief period of final independence before Palestine became a Roman province. Annexation to Rome occurred in 63 B.C., when Jerusalem fell to the legions of Pompey. The Roman hold lasted for seven centuries, by which time a new religion nourished by Old Testament ideas had gained spiritual control of the Western world.

## THE COMPOSITION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Most scholars believe that the earliest actual writings of the Old Testament—and there are few of these—are little earlier than 1200 B.C. It was not until the tenth century B.C. that much began to be recorded, and the earliest sustained writing was probably that of an historian close to the court of David. Writing and revisions continued until approximately 150 B.C., when the Old Testament was declared complete. Such a view of the writing of the Old Testament means that many of the books were written long after the events occurred and that the writers had to rely upon accounts passed down through the centuries by word of mouth as well as upon earlier volumes that may have existed. As history, then, much of the first part of the Old Testament cannot be verified except as certain facts appear as part of records of neighboring people around the Israelites. From the time of David onward, many dates and facts have been authenticated.

By David's reign, a few passages in the Old Testament had been written. Some had come down from earlier times, and such passages as Genesis 4:23 f. (Song of Lamech) and Exodus 15:21 (Song of Miriam) are felt to date from earlier than 1200 B.C. The Song of Deborah (Judges 5) probably dates from the twelfth century, as do the short riddle of Samson (Judges 14:14) and Joshua's command to the sun and moon (Joshua 10:12). David's lament over Saul and Jonathan (II Samuel 1:19 f.) is also thought to be David's own poem composed in the eleventh century B.C. During or shortly after David's reign, the stories of Saul, David, and Solomon were composed (roughly I Samuel 9-20 and I Kings 1-2, as well as other scattered sections of I and II Samuel and I Kings).

THE WRITINGS OF J AND E. In Judah some time before 850 B.C., a most important piece of writing was going on. A writer—or school of writers—referred to as J was compiling a

history of the Jews from the Creation up to the founding of the monarchy. The writing was called J because it was associated with Judah; scholars distinguish the work of this writer from others because it consistently refers to God as Yahveh. J was intensely interested in origins. He told the stories of Adam, the Tower of Babel, Lot and his daughters, and many other narratives dealing with Abraham and his descendants, as well as some stories of the Exodus from Egypt, the wanderings in the wilderness, and the occupation of Canaan. J's God was anthropomorphic, came down to talk with men, and could even be bargained with. He reflected the beliefs of a relatively primitive people. Importantly, though, he was a single God, one who had claimed the Hebrews as his chosen people and was capable of some mercy as well as terrible wrath.

In the Northern Kingdom of Israel no more than a century after J's document there was being written a second account of Hebrew history. This writer, or school of writers, is referred to as E, which name can be equated either with his consistent use of Elohim for God or his association with Ephraim, the most important of the Northern tribes. E began his history with the story of Abraham, and his crowning achievement was the Jacob-Joseph saga, Genesis 27-50. His God was less anthropomorphic and appeared in visions rather than in person. As a whole, E reflected more sophisticated concepts than did J. With the end of the Northern Kingdom, this document found its way to Judah, where it was incorporated with the J writings. The editors of the two texts probably showed preference for the J document when two accounts of the same event occurred; but often the two accounts appear even though one is somewhat different from the other.

D, THE DEUTERONOMIST. During the time of the wicked kings Manasseh and Amon in Judah, a group of unknown men was apparently re-editing all that preceded them, adding frameworks to some stories, and summarizing. In addition, these writers produced an original work, which was probably the book "discovered" in the Temple in 621 B.C., the one which we call Deuteronomy. In his book and in his frameworks, the Deuteronomist, known as D, saw God's punishment as the just result of a person's or a nation's sins. However, D's God was infinitely forgiving and rewarded repentance, as he so often did in the frameworks added by D to the stories in Judges.

P, THE PRIESTLY WRITERS. The Hebrews who returned to Jerusalem in 538 B.C. beheld a dismal prospect. The city was in ruins, the land was poor, the neighbors were hostile. With the encouragement of Ezra and Nehemiah they rebuilt the Temple. Strict laws were enforced to insure the purity of the race and religion, and the priests assumed the main power. At this time, or perhaps even earlier in Babylon, the fourth main strand of the Old Testament was begun. A school of priestly writers, known as P, rearranged the material available to them from the past. The result was a merging of J, E, and D strands with attempts to make them cohere, though there is ample evidence of the patching process. The result, completed about 400 B.C., was the Pentateuch, or first five books of the Bible, practically as it now appears. About half the present Pentateuch is believed to be the work of P. Most notable of P's work was the opening Creation hymn in Genesis; the rest of his work is mainly concerned with details concerning the Temple, the Tabernacle, the priesthood, laws and rituals, and passages sanctioning religious ceremonies by linking them to events in the past. Priestly writers also added the two books of Chronicles and those of Ezra and Nehemiah.

The four strands of J, E, D, and P eventually combined to form the Pentateuch, Joshua, Judges, and parts of I Samuel. I and II Samuel and I and II Kings were largely combinations of court records and of writings in the manner of J and E. All of these books, as well as the others in the Old Testament, bear marks of still other editors; and these editings are frequently referred to as R, for redactor or editor. These books are spoken of variously as the Law (the Pentateuch, or first five books usually attributed to Moses) and the Former Prophets (the historical books which contain accounts of the non-writing prophets).

THE PROPHETIC WRITERS. During the period of the two kingdoms, the Hebrews turned more and more to worship of foreign gods. To combat this evil, there arose the prophets who produced the most powerful ethical writing in the Old Testament. A preview of this writing was in the stories of Elijah and Elisha, which appeared as parts of the two kingdoms' histories recounted in I and II Kings. The histories themselves were compiled much later and were based on records kept at the time; but the stories of the two non-writing prophets are thought to be the work of

an unknown man or men in the late ninth century B.C.

The eighth century before Christ began an amazing period in Hebrew literature that was to continue for about four hundred years. There were the major prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel—the term “major” being used to denote the length of the scroll, and the twelve minor prophets who appeared together on a single scroll. Some became counselors to kings and suffered when their advice was disdained. Others were more like pastors leading an often recalcitrant flock in the times of political distress destroying the two kingdoms. Above all, they were poets using language eloquently to make clear their concepts of a just God and one who finally emerged as clearly monotheistic, the only God who dispensed justice not only to Jews but to the entire world. Some of what they wrote was their own words preserved through the centuries, but most scholars hold that the prophetic books as they now appear are, like the others in the Old Testament, compilations. These prophetic books had apparently been accepted into the Hebrew canon by 200 B.C. Included among them was Jonah, which was not really a book of prophecy but a piece of literature protesting the strict laws imposed by Ezra.

**THE WRITINGS.** The remaining thirteen books entered the canon as Writings, so called because of their varied and unrelated character. These include the Psalms, an anthology of devotional poetry, collected through the years of Hebrew history but dating mainly from the sixth century onward; Proverbs, a compilation of gnomic wisdom probably begun in the fourth century; The Song of Solomon, a collection of erotic poetry dating from about the third century and included as an allegory depicting God’s love for his people only because of the potency of the name of Solomon; and Lamentations, a series of five dirges on the fall of Jerusalem and post-Exilic in origin.

They include also the noble Book of Job, which has been called poetry, drama, and philosophy and is, in fact, all these and more, perhaps post-Exilic in origin; the gently cynical Ecclesiastes, dating almost certainly from post-Hellenic times; the Book of Ruth, protesting the laws of Ezra banning mixed marriages and probably dating from the fifth century; and the amazing piece of revenge literature in Esther, which has been variously dated from the third century to as late as 150 B.C. Of the remainder, we have seen that I and II Chronicles as well as Nehemiah and Ezra belong to the Priestly school. One book



remains, Daniel, and this strange and moving book was probably written at the time of the revolt of the Maccabees around 164 B.C. to give strength through example and apocalyptic vision to those courageous enough to risk their lives for their faith. These books were officially canonized in 90 A.D. by the Council of Jamnia, and the canon, closed at that time, became part of the Christian canon.

However, fourteen books not canonized had been part of the Septuagint translation. These were rejected by the Council of Jamnia for having been written in Greek or for being too recent in composition. These books comprise the Apocrypha (Greek for hidden, mysterious, or spurious) and appear as part of the Roman Catholic publications of the Old Testament. Protestant Bibles in English at first included the Apocrypha but soon dropped it, and students using the King James Translation must look elsewhere for these books. In addition to the books of the Apocrypha, eighteen other books, the Pseudepigrapha, were outside the canon of the Septuagint. Largely apocalyptic and written in the first century B.C., they are mentioned because they are quoted frequently in the New Testament.

NOTE: In this study guide, we have not followed the strict order of the books in the King James Version of the Bible. We begin with the Pentateuch and continue with the historical books which tell the story of the Hebrew tribes. Ruth, Jonah, and Esther have been displaced from their usual order and grouped together, for each is a separate story not directly related to the rest of the Bible. The Book of Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes, the "wisdom literature," are discussed together, as are the three books of lyric poetry in the Bible, the Psalms, The Song of Solomon, and Lamentations. We conclude with the prophetic writings, and the apocryphal Book of Daniel. References are to chapter and verse of the books; for example, Genesis 4:23 refers to Chapter 4, verse 23, of the Book of Genesis.

# SUMMARIES AND DISCUSSIONS

## GENESIS

### SYNOPSIS: The Creation (1-2:7)

God accomplished the Creation in six days. On the first day he created a heaven and a formless earth from the chaos preceding order. "Let there be light," the divine command separating day and night, completed the first miracle. The second day saw the creation of "a firmament . . . [to] divide the waters from the waters." Here the firmament—or sky—was a kind of inverted bowl separating the waters of heaven from the waters which support earth, and through apertures in the firmament the waters of heaven—or rain—could fall to nourish earth.

On the third day God formed the earth and seas, and vegetation—grass, herbs (vegetables), and fruit trees—capable of reproducing by seeds. The fourth day saw the creation of the sun, moon, and stars, so that man might use them "for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years." On the fifth day appeared birds and the creatures of the water, including "great whales," all species being capable of reproducing themselves.

The sixth day saw the major miracle, the appearance of the beasts of the earth and finally the creation of man. God created man "in his own image," and "male and female created he them." He charged man with the responsibility of multiplying, or subduing the earth, and of ruling the fish, fowls, and creatures of the earth. Having finished and seen that his work was good, God set the seventh day aside for his rest and ordained that the day be kept sacred by man in memory of his debt to God and the establishment of divine order in the world.

### DISCUSSION

The first version of the Creation is ascribed to the Priestly school of writers (P) and therefore was written no earlier than the fifth century B.C. Believed by many to be the noblest work of the Priestly writers, the Hymn to Creation takes up all of Chapter 1 and the first three (some say four) verses of Chapter 2. It is a noble early attempt to explain the mystery of the beginning of everything, to answer a question to which science has yet only

incomplete solutions. It also establishes the sanctity of the seventh day as a day of rest and worship.

Many scholars see a second account of the Creation beginning with Genesis 2:3-4, and ascribe much of it to the J writers of the Pentateuch about 850 B.C. They point out that a new story is indicated by the fact that 2:5 states, "there was not a man to till the ground," though 1:27 has already shown God to have created both male and female. In the second story God formed man from the dust of the earth and breathed the soul of life into him, and the J writer indicated that he saw the relationship between God and man in more concrete detail than did the Priestly writer almost four centuries later.

### **SYNOPSIS: Adam and Eve (2:8-3)**

For Adam, the man he has created (Adam is the Hebrew word for "man"), God planted "a garden eastward in Eden," containing "every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food." The garden contained also the tree of life and the tree of knowledge, and God warned Adam that "of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat." God let Adam name the animals, and the names Adam chose remained as languages began. Because he saw that "It is not good that the man should be alone," God created "an help meet for him." Putting Adam into a profound sleep, God removed one of his ribs and from it fashioned the first woman. He then awakened Adam and introduced him to Eve. Adam called her "Woman, because she was taken out of Man," and noted that she was "bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh," as a precedent for marriage. In the future man will "leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh."

Though naked, Adam and Eve were not ashamed. In this garden of innocence, however, was also the serpent, "more subtil than any beast of the field." The serpent suggested to Eve that God told Adam not to eat of the tree of knowledge only because he feared that men, knowing good and evil, would be gods themselves. He also stated that the tree was not poisonous and would not cause man to die, as God had warned. Persuaded of the goodness of the fruit and desiring wisdom like God's, Eve ate and gave the fruit to Adam, who also ate. At once they knew the shame of nakedness and covered themselves with fig leaves.

As God walked in the garden in the evening, he could not

find Adam and Eve, who had hidden in shame and fear. Adam answered at God's call, acknowledged that he was ashamed to appear naked, and disclosed his guilt. For having violated God's commandment, Adam blamed "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me," and Eve blamed the serpent. The serpent was the first to bear God's wrath; for his part in the fall of man, he was condemned to go on his belly forever and to be at constant enmity with man, who "shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." Eve's punishment was the pain of childbirth and subordination to her husband; Adam's was to till the stubborn earth and by hard work to rid it of weeds in order to gain his food. Because of their disobedience, Adam and Eve and their descendants (seed) would work in sorrow until the end of their days, when in death they would return to the dust from which God made them: "for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." The serpent had been wrong. Though not immediate, death was indeed a result of the eating of the fruit of the tree.

God fashioned skins into clothing for Adam and Eve. Then, because "the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil" and to prevent Adam from also eating of the tree of life and thereby becoming immortal, God exiled him from Eden. Adam and Eve were driven forth to till the land in sorrow, and at the gate of the garden an angel with a flaming sword was posted to keep from man the tree of immortality.

## DISCUSSION

The J writer continued his story with the account of man's first sin and the punishment visited upon all his descendants. In J's writing, God is very like a man (anthropomorphic). He is more like a stern, just father than like the Spirit that "moved upon the face of the waters" in the first chapter. He makes rules and punishes those who disobey, he talks with Adam, and he shows Adam and Eve the manner of clothing by making their costumes himself. To most Biblical authorities, he represents a conception of God less sophisticated than that envisioned by mankind in later centuries.

Just as the story of the Creation represents a noble, poetic answer to the mystery of how the earth and life came about, the story of the Garden of Eden gives a reason for man's suffering and hardships. The story specifically attributes the travail of childbirth and difficulties of cultivation to man's first disobedience,



and also sets a precedent for marriage and for the Jewish practice of having the female subordinate to the male. Many of the people surrounding the Jews worshiped a female creatress, practiced matriarchy, and considered the snake sacred. Making the serpent the villain of the garden may have been a way for the Jews to demonstrate the falseness of their neighbors' gods.

### **SYNOPSIS: Cain, Abel, and Seth (4-6:4)**

The first children of Adam and Eve were Cain and Abel. Cain, the first-born, became a farmer, "a tiller of the ground"; Abel was "a keeper of sheep." When the two brothers brought their sacrifices to the Lord, the shepherd's gifts found favor while the farmer's did not. Cain, jealous of his brother, came upon Abel in the field and slew him. To God, who shortly afterward asked where Abel was, Cain replied, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Noting that Abel's "blood crieth unto me from the ground," God cursed Cain by denying him fertile ground to till and by making him "a fugitive and a vagabond." To protect the perpetual fugitive from being slain, God put a mark upon him and promised that he would take vengeance sevenfold on anyone who would kill Cain.

Driven from the Lord's presence, Cain settled in the land of Nod, and here his son Enoch built a city and began the generations of Cain. Among the descendants were Jubal, "the father of all such as handle the harp and organ," and Tubal-cain, the father of "every artificer in brass and iron." Another was Lamech, to whom is ascribed what many believe to be the oldest portion of the entire Bible, the Song of Lamech (4:23-24).

A third son, Seth, was born to Adam and Eve to replace the dead Abel and the lost Cain, and he became a more fitting progenitor for a chosen people. The ten generations from Adam to Noah are listed, and among the generations are two names that have fascinated readers—those of Enoch, who "walked with God: and he was not; for God took him," and of Methusaleh, whose days "were nine hundred sixty and nine years" and who therefore becomes the oldest man in the Bible.

The first four verses of Chapter 6 relate a primitive legend concerning "sons of God" who saw "the daughters of men," married them, and begat "giants in the earth, . . . mighty men which were of old, men of renown."

## DISCUSSION

Cain's descendants became what we might call "civilized" faster than the other descendants of Adam. They were the first to settle in cities (Enoch), the first to play music (Jubal), and were the first smiths (Tubal-cain). However, because they were descended from Cain, the J writer could hardly have approved of them.

The Song of Lamech (4:23-24) has been dated in composition as early as 1500 B.C. Some see it as a celebration of the invention of metal weapons and a song passed down, as were many Biblical fragments, by word of mouth until it was finally incorporated in a written fabric. The song is a poem and can be arranged thus:

Adah and Zillah, hear my voice;  
ye wives of Lamech, hearken unto my speech:  
for I have slain a man to my wounding,  
and a young man to my hurt.  
If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold,  
truly Lamech seventy and sevenfold.

It can be studied to illustrate the parallelism of ideas characteristic of Hebrew poetry. Note the three couplets, each developing by parallel repetition a single idea. In the first couplet "Adah and Zillah" become in repetition "ye wives of Lamech"; and "hear my voice" changes to "hearken unto my speech." How is the parallelism continued in the next couplets?

## SYNOPSIS: Noah and the Flood (6:5-10)

By the time of Noah the wickedness of man was so great that God decided to destroy mankind, in whom he found "that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Only Noah and his family found favor. All the rest, "both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air, . . . it repenteth me that I have made. . . ."

To Noah God disclosed his plan: "I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life." Noah, his wife, his three sons, and their wives were to be excepted. Noah was given an exact blueprint for an ark to be constructed of gopher wood; in this his family and a menagerie of the animals of earth were to ride out the flood safely. According to the J version, Noah was to admit to the ark "two of every sort" of living flesh. According to P, he was to

admit only pairs of the unclean animals; the clean ones "thou shalt take to thee by sevens, the male and his female."

Seven days after the final warning, a mighty rainfall began and continued for forty days and forty nights, destroying all life except that within Noah's ark. So great was the flood that "the waters prevailed upon the earth an hundred and fifty days." But God remembered Noah and "made a wind to pass over the earth, . . . The fountains also of the deep and the windows of heaven were stopped, and the rain from heaven was restrained." The flood began to abate, and the ark "rested in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, upon the mountains of Ararat." After forty days, Noah opened a window of the ark and sent out a raven, which did not return. He also sent out a dove, which did return, for she had "found no rest for the sole of her foot." Seven days later he sent the dove out again, and she returned with an olive leaf in her mouth to signify that the waters were receding. After seven more days, the dove was sent out a third time and returned no more. Noah then released the animals as God had commanded.

Upon leaving the ark, Noah built an altar and sacrificed burnt offerings "of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl." Pleased by the "sweet savour" of the burnt offerings, "the Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake. . . . While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease." With Noah and his sons God made a promise that "the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh." As token of his covenant God set the rainbow in the cloud so that man might forever remember his promise.

Noah planted a vineyard, and one day, having drunk too much of his own wine, he lay unclothed and asleep in his tent. His nakedness was observed by his son Ham, who told his brothers Shem and Japheth. These two brothers averted their eyes and covered their father properly, but Ham's act had been discerned by his father. Upon waking, sober and furious with Ham, Noah cursed not Ham but Ham's son Canaan, condemning him and his descendants to be forever "servants unto his brethren."

Chapter 10 establishes the lines of Noah's three sons. Japheth's sons were many, and "by these were the isles of the Gentiles divided." To the writer, these descendants accounted for the people north and to the west, among them the Greeks—the

Javanites and Dodanimites. In addition to the Canaanites, the descendants of the erring Ham included Nimrod, "the mighty hunter before the Lord," and accounted for the Egyptians and the other African races. The sons of Shem—Shemites, or today's Semites—accounted for those races with whom the Jews acknowledged kinship by feature, custom, and language.

## DISCUSSION

The Old Testament has several instances of God's promises to a man or to a people. One of these, God's covenant with Abraham to the effect that the Jews are a chosen people for a chosen land, is repeated throughout the Old Testament. The covenant with Noah presents an anthropomorphic picture of the deity. God is not only moved to wrath by the wickedness of mankind, but he is delighted with the sweet savor of burning flesh in the same way the Greek gods were.

Noah's curse-song is actually a poem. Such poems containing both curses and blessings are a regular part of the Old Testament and indicate the belief that a powerful patriarch could, in his old age, determine the future of his children and their descendants. The song itself, taken with the text that follows, is an explanation for the nations known to exist around the Jews. Advocates of Negro segregation have argued that Noah's curse is divine precedent for slavery and unequal treatment of blacks because of Noah's curse on the Hamitic (African) people. A close reading of the text (9:25) shows that Canaan, Ham's son, was cursed rather than his father. The Canaanites were the enemy from whom the Israelites had to wrest Palestine. Their ways, as well as their hold on the land, were regarded as the essence of evil; therefore, it was natural that they should be descendants of an accursed progenitor.

## SYNOPSIS: The Tower of Babel (11:1-9)

After the Flood, all people of the earth spoke one language. In their wanderings they reached the plain of Shinar and dwelt there as a united people until, in their pride, they attempted to build a tower "whose top may reach unto heaven." The Lord was angered at their boldness and decided to "confound their language" by making them speak various languages so that they could not understand one another. The people were scattered "upon the face of all the earth" and the tower was left unfinished.



So ended man's attempt to build a tower to heaven; and the tower received the name Babel, a pun on *balal*—to mix or to confuse.

## DISCUSSION

Like the story of Noah's descendants, the tower story is an explanation, this time of the number of different languages known to the ancient Jews. It is also a morality story, pointing to pride as a great evil. Like Eve, who wanted to become like God, the men of Babel were punished for aspiring too highly.

## SYNOPSIS: The Story of Abram (Abraham) (11:10-21)

Chapter 11 traces the genealogy of Shem to Terah, father of Abram and grandfather of Lot. Accompanied by Abram, Abram's wife Sarai, and by Lot, Terah left the land of Ur of the Chaldees, near the mouth of the Euphrates River, and journeyed north to Haran (Padan-Aram) near the northernmost part of the Fertile Crescent. After Terah's death in Haran, Abram took his family and Lot and journeyed south, beckoned by the Lord's promise: "Get thee out . . . unto a land that I will shew thee." On the plain of Moreh, the Lord appeared to Abram and said, "Unto thy seed will I give this land." Here and later at Bethel, Abram built an altar to memorialize the promise.

Abram and Lot continued their nomadic way, and a grievous famine caused them to go to Egypt. Abram feared that the Pharaoh might kill him and take his beautiful wife Sarai for his harem, and Abram therefore told Sarai to say that she was his sister. As Abram's sister, Sarai became one of the Pharaoh's household and Abram received many gifts from the ruler. But the Lord inflicted great plagues upon the Pharaoh's house because of Sarai, and the Pharaoh asked Abram, "why didst thou not tell me she was thy wife?" Sarai was returned to Abram, and they left Egypt much richer than they had come.

With Lot, Abram returned to Bethel, and there the two patriarchs prospered until it became apparent that the land could not support both families. Abram generously offered Lot his choice of location, and Lot chose to live on the then well-watered plain of Jordan, near Sodom and Gomorrah. The Lord again visited Abram and promised to him and his descendants all the land he could see in all directions. Content, Abram settled in Hebron and built there an altar.

When Lot was captured in an enemy attack upon Sodom and Gomorrah, Abram pursued the enemy nearly to Damascus and rescued his nephew and the booty stolen from the cities. Upon his return, Abram was blessed by Melchizedek, high priest and king of Salem, and returned all the goods belonging to Sodom, retaining only enough to pay three of his followers.

Abram had a vision in which he complained to God that he had no children or heirs other than his steward Eliezer, and the Lord promised him an heir. He took Abram into the clear night, showed him the stars, and promised him descendants as numberless as the stars. Abram offered a sacrifice and then fell into a deep slumber. In his dream he saw the future: his many descendants as strangers in the land of Egypt, and his own honored death and burial. In the vision God then sealed his covenant with Abram by passing between the pieces of the sacrifice as "a smoking furnace and a burning lamp." According to the covenant, Abram's descendants were promised the land "from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates," a territory then held by ten different small nations.

Despite the several promises of a line of descendants, Abram was still childless and was growing old. Chapter 16 relates one of two stories of Abram's first son. In this story by J, the barren Sarai convinced her husband to take her servant Hagar as his concubine. He did so, but when Hagar was with child "her mistress was despised in her eyes." Ill will grew between the two women until Hagar was forced to flee into the desert. An angel of the Lord found her in the wilderness and told her to return. She would bear, he told her, a son whose descendants "shall not be numbered for multitude." The child should be named Ishmael: "And he will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him. . . ." Hagar then returned to Abram's tent and bore her son to him in his eighty-sixth year.

Thirteen years later the Lord returned once more to Abram. This visit is detailed in Chapter 17. He ordered the patriarch to change his name to Abraham and that of his wife to Sarah. He also commanded the rite of circumcision of all males, and Abraham immediately carried out the rite on himself, on Ishmael, and on all his male servants. Once more the Lord reminded Abraham of the covenant, but this time he promised that Sarah would become the mother of many nations. God was explicit:

the child would be a son, he would be born within a year, he should be named Isaac, and he would receive the advantages of the divine covenant already made with Abraham. As for Ishmael, for whom his father was concerned, God promised to bless him and to make him the father of twelve princes and founder of a mighty nation.

Chapter 18 concerns itself once more with Sarah's child-to-be and with the destruction of the wicked cities of Lot's land. Three men visited Abraham, and one of them he called "My Lord." Abraham accorded them the greatest hospitality. After they had eaten, the Lord said that Sarah would conceive and bear a son. Hearing this pronouncement, in her ninetieth year, "Sarah laughed within herself." The Lord chided her for her lack of faith: "Is any thing too hard for the Lord?" Then he disclosed to Abraham his plan for destroying the cities of the plain, "because their sin is very grievous." At this point "the men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom: but Abraham stood yet before the Lord." With perfect humility but with the skill of a bazaarman, Abraham began to bargain with his God over the question "Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?" He persuaded the Lord to save Sodom, first if he could find fifty righteous men among its inhabitants, and finally, if he could find ten righteous men.

The men who had left Abraham's tent proceeded to Lot's house in Sodom. Though Lot welcomed the divine messengers hospitably, the men of the wicked city showed the Lord there were not even ten righteous men in Sodom. The Sodomites demanded that the messengers be given to them for their own perverse uses and would not be dissuaded even by Lot's offer of his two virgin daughters. Finally the messengers smote the Sodomites with a blindness. To Lot they disclosed their plan of destruction and commanded him to remove his family to safety: "Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed." Lot had been unable to persuade his sons-in-law to go with him, and only he, his wife, and two unmarried daughters fled toward the mountains. By morning they had reached the city of Zoar near the mountains, and this city alone the Lord promised to save out of pity for Lot's fatigue. "Then the Lord rained . . . brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven." Lot's wife forgot she was not to look back upon the evil that had been her

home; she looked back "and she became a pillar of salt." With his two daughters Lot made his way to the mountains, and there, in their despair of never having husbands and children, the daughters made their father drunk, lay with him, and begat sons. These men, Moab and Ben-ammi, founded the races of Moabites and Ammonites.

Chapter 21 relates another story of Abraham's son by Hagar, this version by the E writer. As the Lord had promised, Sarah bore a son, Isaac. This variant of the Hagar story has Sarah demand that her husband banish Hagar and Ishmael after her own son Isaac has been weaned. Abraham was grieved by the request, but was comforted when God promised he would care for the pair. Hagar and Ishmael wandered in the desert until their water was gone; then Hagar put the child in the shade of a bush, turned her head so that she might not see him die, and wept. The Lord then appeared, comforted her, caused a well of water to appear, and saved them. They lived in the wilderness of Paran, where Ishmael became an archer and married a wife from Egypt.

## DISCUSSION

God's covenant with Abraham was somewhat different from that with Noah, who represented all mankind. This new covenant was specifically with Israel through Abraham and would be repeated throughout the Old Testament to become the controlling element of Judaism.

Three stories in the Abraham record account for races of men the Jews knew. Ishmael is the traditional founder of the Arab races, and the incestuous union between Lot and his daughters explained to the Israelites the presence of the neighboring and perverse Moabite and Ammonite tribes.

The E writer first appears in Chapter 15, where "the word of the Lord came . . . in a vision. . . ." The E version of Hebrew history pictures God as more remote from man than does the J version. E's God is most often a God appearing in dreams and visions rather than a God incarnate. E also tells his stories with greater delicacy than does J, as can be seen by comparing the variants of the Hagar story, for example.

## SYNOPSIS: The Story of Isaac (22-25:26)

When Isaac was yet a small boy, God tempted Abraham



by commanding him to take his only son to Moriah and there sacrifice Isaac as a burnt offering. The faithful Abraham obeyed and after a three-day journey reached the designated spot. Knowing his father carried the fire and wood for a sacrifice, Isaac asked where was the lamb for the offering. Abraham replied that the Lord would provide one. He bound Isaac on the altar he had constructed; but just as he took the knife to slay his son, an angel of the Lord stayed his hand. God commended Abraham's faithfulness and provided a ram, caught by the horns in a nearby thicket, for the sacrifice instead. Once more God promised that Abraham's line would be fruitful and that "in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice."

Sarah died and was buried in the cave of Machpelah. Abraham wished Isaac to marry a woman of his own kin, and knowing that his brother Nahor in Haran had a large family, he sent his servant north "unto my country, and to my kindred" to find a suitable wife. The servant departed laden with gifts for a prospective bride's family. As he rested beside a well in Nahor's city, the servant prayed that the proper wife for Isaac would be whichever girl would draw water for him and also for his ten camels. The girl who politely drew water for all was Rebekah, granddaughter of Nahor. Her family agreed to the marriage, and Rebekah herself agreed that they would leave for the south the next day, rather than remain for ten further days with her family. One evening while Isaac was meditating in the field, the bridal procession arrived from the north, and Rebekah "became his wife; and he loved her. . . ."

Chapter 25 tells of the generations of Abraham by his second wife, his death and burial at Machpelah, and the generations of Ishmael. It also deals with Isaac's inheritance of the bulk of his father's possessions and the barrenness of his wife Rebekah. Finally Rebekah conceived twins, and because the pair "struggled together within her," she inquired of the Lord. She was told that two nations were in her womb and that "the elder shall serve the younger." The first-born of the twins was Esau, hairy and red; the second born was Jacob, and he was born with his hand taking "hold on Esau's heel."

## DISCUSSION

The near sacrifice of Isaac is, with the story of Jephthah's

daughter in Judges, the only indication that the earliest Hebrews may, like their neighbors, have practiced human sacrifice. Similar tales occur in other folk literature, the most notable being that of Agamemnon's sacrifice of his daughter Iphigenia in order to gain favorable winds for the fleet bound for the Trojan War.

**SYNOPSIS: The Story of Jacob (Israel)  
(25:27-36)**

Between the twins Jacob and Esau a rivalry sprang up much like that between Cain and Abel. The red, hairy Esau—founder of the tribe of Edomites with whom the Israelites fought—became a hunter and was favored by his father, perhaps because as the eldest, he had the right to inherit his father's wealth and blessing. The quieter Jacob, "a plain man, dwelling in tents," was favored by his mother. Jacob was far cleverer than Esau. His first trick was to get from Esau his birthright, or the rights of primogeniture by which the elder brother would inherit the larger share of the estate. He did so by persuading the hungry Esau, who had returned from hunting, to sell his birthright for bread and a pottage of lentils.

The Jacob narrative is interrupted (Chapter 26) while J retells the folk tale of the man, this time Isaac, passing off his wife as his sister. Chapter 27 brings us back to Isaac, now aged and blind. Fearing the imminence of death, Isaac requested Esau to bring him savory venison, promising a potent blessing in return. Overhearing her husband's words, Rebekah aided Jacob to outwit his father and elder brother. She prepared a substitute for the savory venison from goat meat, dressed Jacob in Esau's clothes and covered him with the skin of young goats, so that to blind Isaac Jacob would smell and feel like Esau. Taken in by the trick, Isaac blessed Jacob with the blessing intended for Esau. When Esau later appeared and discovered the ruse, Isaac could grant Esau only a lesser blessing.

Having now acquired—in addition to his brother's birthright and blessing—the hatred of Esau, who had sworn to kill him at the first opportunity, Jacob left for his mother's birthplace in Haran. The P writer excuses Jacob's flight by having him leave after Rebekah persuaded Isaac that Jacob should have a wife of his own kin. On his way to Haran, Jacob dreamed of a ladder reaching to heaven, on which angels ascended and descended; at the top of the ladder was God, who renewed with

Jacob the covenant he had made with Isaac. Young Jacob commemorated the spot with an altar, called it Bethel, and promised the Lord a tithe (tenth) of his income.

At Haran, Jacob fell in love with Rachel, daughter to Laban, his mother's brother. His uncle Laban, however, was one of the few to outwit Jacob. He bargained with Jacob, who agreed to work seven years for Laban in return for Rachel as bride. In the dark of Jacob's wedding night, though, Laban substituted the older, less comely sister, Leah, as the bride. To get his beloved Rachel as a second wife, Jacob then had to agree to work seven years more for his uncle.

From these women, and their two maids whom Jacob took as concubines, are descended the twelve tribes of Israel. From Leah, whom the Lord favored when he saw that she "was hated," came the tribes of Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, and later, with the magic of mandrake herbs, Issachar and Zebulun. Leah also had a daughter, Dinah. From Bilhah, the maid whom Rachel gave to Isaac because of her own continued barrenness, came the tribes of Dan and Naphtali. From Zilpah, Leah's maid given to Jacob in reprisal for Rachel's maid, came the tribes of Gad and Asher. From Rachel, who finally conceived, came the tribes of Joseph and Benjamin.

After serving twenty years for his uncle, Jacob at last had the better of him. He persuaded Laban to give him as his portion those cattle and goats that were "ringstraked, speckled, and spotted." Then by use of magic rods he caused the stronger animals in his uncle's herds to bear speckled young, which then became the property of Jacob. In Chapter 31 P glosses over Jacob's trickery by having him tell how often Laban has cheated him, how virtuously he has labored, and how the Lord himself has given permission for Jacob to enrich himself and to depart with his now large portion for the land of his birth. With his family and his flocks, Jacob set forth, but Laban soon caught up with him. Unknown to Jacob, Rachel had stolen her father's household gods. Laban never did find them, for Rachel, pleading that "the custom of women is upon me," sat upon them all the while her father searched for them.

Jacob and Laban finally resolved their differences, pledged their friendship upon a cairn they built, and bade each other a final farewell. When Jacob came near the lands of Esau, he sent presents before him to placate the brother he had wronged. At

the ford of the brook called Jabbok, Jacob "wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day." Jacob's strength prevailed, and his opponent blessed him and changed his name from Jacob (meaning supplanter, cheater) to Israel (meaning contender with God). Jacob called the spot Peniel, "for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved."

Under his new dignified name, Israel did only good. By judicious and generous gifts he made peace with Esau and passed safely through Esau's land; he bought property in Canaanite territory, settled, and erected an altar. When two of his sons killed all the males of a neighboring city because the ruler's son had raped their sister Dinah, Israel moved on to Bethel. But before beginning this journey, Israel heeded a new injunction from his God: he forced his household to "Put away the strange gods . . . among you," for he was now giving fealty to a single deity. On the journey to Bethel, Rachel died giving birth to Benjamin.

## DISCUSSION

Jacob is presented in two entirely different ways. During his young manhood he was a scamp, the subject of several folk tales in which he matched his cunning against that of people near to him and usually won. Upon his return to his homeland, his name was changed to Israel after he wrestled all night with the angel; and from then on, he became the wise and temperate founder of the twelve tribes. Most of the narrative is that of J, though P has been at work on some of the text.

There is much evidence of primitive magic in these chapters. The magic of an aged man's word—his blessing—is indicated by the rivalry of Jacob and Esau for their father's blessing. The sympathetic magic of wands that can influence the color and size of animals if used during their conception is evidenced by Jacob's use of such a rod to outwit Laban. The power of mandrake as an aid to love and conception is seen in the dispute between Rachel and Leah (30:14-17) for possession of this herb. Those interested in further explanation of folk magic may consult Frazer's *The Golden Bough*.

Bethel (house of God), ten miles north of Jerusalem, has special significance throughout the Old Testament. Abraham built an altar there. Jacob had his ladder dream there, and the third shrine he built there can be identified with his casting



away of all idols (35:2-7) in the first ban against strange gods mentioned in the Bible. The shrine at Bethel was the outstanding religious center of the Northern Kingdom before it was conquered by Assyria, and it was there that the prophet Amos appeared to denounce the folly of the Israelites in the seventh century B.C.

### **SYNOPSIS: Joseph and His Brothers (Chapters 37-50)**

Joseph was his father's favorite, and as a sign of affection his father gave him a coat of many colors. Joseph's brothers envied his coat and were angered at his dreams that his brothers' sheaves of grain bowed down to his sheaves and the sun, moon, and eleven stars paid homage to him. They therefore conspired to slay him, but Reuben persuaded them instead to abandon Joseph in a dry well. They stripped Joseph of his coat, put him in the well, and then Judah suggested they sell him to some passing Midianites as a slave. They dyed his coat with goat's blood and showed it to their father, who mourned the son he thought had been attacked by a wild beast.

In Egypt the Midianites sold Joseph to Potiphar, a captain in the Pharaoh's guard, and the young man worked so well that he was soon advanced to overseer of the household. However, Potiphar's wife desired him, and though he repulsed her advances, she caught him one day and he was forced to flee and leave his garment in her hand. Out of hatred for his virtue, she showed this garment to her husband as proof that Joseph had attempted to seduce her, and Joseph was put into prison.

In prison Joseph interpreted the dreams of the Pharaoh's butler and baker, who had also been imprisoned. He correctly explained the baker's dream to mean his beheading within three days and the butler's to mean his restoration to favor within the same time. Two years later, the Pharaoh had two dreams which his magicians could not explain. At the butler's recommendation Joseph was brought from prison to hear the dreams: that seven fat cows were devoured by seven lean cows, and seven fat ears of grain were devoured by seven thin ears. Joseph foretold seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine and counseled the ruler to lay up a storehouse of grain in readiness for the famine. The Pharaoh was so pleased with the plan that he made Joseph second in power to himself and gave him a wife who

bore him two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. After seven years, as Joseph had predicted, famine came, and men were forced to come to Joseph for food.

Among those who heard of the food available in Egypt was the family of Israel in Palestine. Leaving behind only Benjamin, Joseph's one full brother, ten sons of Israel journeyed to Egypt to buy food. They were presented to Joseph, who recognized his brothers but was not yet ready to grant his full forgiveness. He accused them of being spies in the land and seized Simeon as hostage, promising to release him only if the others returned with their youngest brother, Benjamin. Joseph then filled their grain sacks but commanded his servants secretly to restore each man's money in the sacks.

Upon the brothers' return to Israel without Simeon, their father was so grieved that he would not let them return with Benjamin. However, the famine compelled them to make a second trip to Egypt, this time with Benjamin and special gifts for the strange Egyptian official. When the brothers saw Joseph again, they confessed that they had found the money in their sacks. He surprised them by being gentle, freeing Simeon, and inviting them to dine. Before sending them home, he commanded his servants to put his silver cup secretly into Benjamin's sack and then to follow and apprehend the Hebrews, charging them with theft.

The brothers pleaded innocent when they were stopped, but a search revealed the cup in Benjamin's sack and the men were returned to Joseph. Judah pleaded so eloquently for Benjamin's release for his old father's sake that Joseph revealed his identity to his brothers and invited them to come with their families and live in Egypt. Hearing that Joseph lived, Israel gladly made the journey with his sixty-six descendants. The Hebrews, because they were shepherds, settled in the fertile land of Goshen in the Nile Delta.

Israel now neared death, and Joseph brought his sons for their grandfather's blessing. The blessing gave to Ephraim, the second born, a larger portion than to Manasseh, the elder. Israel was buried as he had requested in the cave of Machpelah along with Abraham, Isaac, and their wives. Joseph repeated his full forgiveness to his brothers, who had feared his revenge once their father was dead. Before his own death, Joseph promised the Israelites that God would eventually return them to the land

promised to Abraham, and made them promise to carry his bones with them.

## DISCUSSION

The J and E versions of the Joseph story fuse so completely that the last fourteen chapters of Genesis can be read with little difficulty. Chapters 38 and 46 interrupt the narrative somewhat, but the various incidents are woven admirably into a sustained long piece of literature. With Joseph, the Israelites have come into Egypt, where after many years will begin the first of their many persecutions.

The name Joseph is not found among the twelve tribes of Israel. However, Joseph's portion is double, for each of his sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, founded a tribe. Of these, as Israel's blessing indicates, Ephraim was the more powerful and the center of the Northern Kingdom.

# EXODUS

## SYNOPSIS: The Story of Moses

THE BONDAGE IN EGYPT AND THE CALL TO MOSES (CHAPTERS 1-4). "Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph." Fearing that the Israelites would try to make common cause with one of Egypt's enemies, this Pharaoh enslaved them. Despite the hard tasks set for them, the Israelites continued to multiply. The two midwives attending the Israelite women were ordered to kill all male children; and for not heeding this command, the Lord rewarded the midwives with "houses," or lines of descendants. When the Pharaoh saw that the Israelites continued to proliferate, he ordered all their male babies drowned at birth. Among those who would have lost a son was "a certain Levite," whose wife hid their baby boy for three months before setting him afloat "in the flags by the river's brink" in "an ark of bulrushes" made watertight with pitch. The Pharaoh's daughter found the child, had pity on him, and paid the mother, who was promptly fetched by the babe's watching sister, to nurse the boy. When he was grown, the boy was delivered to the princess, who named him Moses, "Because I drew him out of the water."

Despite his Egyptian training, Moses had pity on the Israel-

ites and their mistreatment; one day he slew an Egyptian for harming a Hebrew. Forced to flee, he wandered to Midian, where he was hospitably received by Reuel (Jethro). He became herder for the Midianite and married his daughter, Zipporah, who bore him a son, Gershom.

One day while minding Jethro's flocks near Mount Horeb, Moses noted a bush which was burning but "was not consumed." Curious, he approached and heard from the bush the voice of God, who identified himself as "I AM THAT I AM" and commanded Moses to return to Egypt and lead the Israelites out of bondage to the land promised to Abraham. Moses protested that the Israelites would not believe him, and God gave him magical powers—a rod that could be turned into a serpent and the ability to make his hand leprous and then clean—to convince them. For a further protest that he was "of a slow tongue," Moses was rebuked for doubting the power of the Lord and was commanded to use his brother Aaron as a spokesman. Moses then took his family into Egypt, where Aaron, who had also been commanded by God, met him near the frontier. Together the brothers assembled the elders of Israel and revealed to them God's plan.

THE STUBBORNNESS OF THE PHARAOH AND THE TEN PLAGUES (CHAPTERS 5-13). Moses and Aaron entreated the Pharaoh to let the Israelites go a three days' journey into the wilderness so that they might sacrifice and worship their God. The Pharaoh reacted by commanding his overseers to work the Israelites harder so that they would have less time to complain. No longer were they to be given straw to mix with their mortar; instead, they would have to gather it for themselves while at the same time turning out their usual quota of sun-baked bricks. The new order threw the Israelites into dismay, and they blamed Moses, as they were to do many times during the next forty years.

Moses was sustained by his God, who told him to go again to the Pharaoh, with Aaron as his spokesman. At this time Moses was eighty years of age and Aaron eighty-three. Before the ruler, Aaron cast down the magic rod which turned into a serpent; but the Pharaoh's magicians were able to do the same trick. Unimpressed even when Aaron's serpent had eaten the serpents of his magicians, the Pharaoh turned deaf ears to the threat of plagues against his people.

Ten plagues against the Egyptians were necessary to soften



the Pharaoh's heart. First, all the waters of Egypt were turned to blood. The court magicians succeeded in doing the same thing, and the Pharaoh did not relent. Second, frogs filled the land. Though the magicians could also work this magic, the Pharaoh promised to let the Israelites make their sacrificial journey if Moses would remove the frogs. He broke this promise.

Third, the dust turned to lice to afflict the Egyptians. Though the court magicians could not duplicate this feat, the Pharaoh was not moved to pity. Fourth, swarms of flies infested the land except for the Israelite enclave in Goshen. To be rid of the flies, the Pharaoh gave permission for the Hebrews' departure but once more took back the permission when the plague abated. Fifth, a murrain (epidemic) destroyed the cattle of the Egyptians but not of the Israelites. Sixth, the Egyptians were so sorely afflicted with boils that the magicians could not stand before their king.

Seventh, a grievous hail accompanied by thunder and fire (lightning) that "ran along the ground" wasted all the land except that in Goshen. Eighth, locusts "covered the face of the whole earth" and ate up everything not already destroyed. Ninth, a three-day darkness (perhaps a sand storm) turned day into night everywhere but in Goshen. After trying unsuccessfully to bargain Moses into leaving without his people's flocks, the Pharaoh told Moses to leave his presence forever. Moses answered, "I will see thy face again no more."

God now instructed Moses to command the Israelites to borrow from their Egyptian neighbors valuable jewels so that in the impending escape the Egyptians would be despoiled. Moses then directed the Israelites to ritually kill lambs, roast them, and eat them with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. With a branch of hyssop they were to sprinkle the blood of the lambs on the lintels and two side posts of their homes, and were then to stay indoors. During the night the Lord passed over the marked homes of the Israelites as he carried out the final plague—the murder of the firstborn of each Egyptian, from "Pharaoh that sat on his throne unto the firstborn of the captive that was in the dungeon; and all the firstborn of cattle." As his passover was the greatest and last of the ten miracles, God commanded Moses to set this time as an annual solemn observance.

Persuaded finally that the Israelites were indeed divinely aided, the Pharaoh ordered them to leave. Wearing the jewelry

borrowed from their Egyptian neighbors, and followed by their flocks, Moses' people left at once, carrying with them their bread still unleavened and the kneading troughs "bound up in their clothes upon their shoulders." The time between Joseph and the Israelites' escape from bondage in Egypt is given (12:40) as 430 years. The children of Israel, who in Joseph's time numbered seventy, had grown to "about six hundred thousand" (12:37), a figure that seems much too large to most authorities. God went as their guide, "by day in a pillar of a cloud . . . and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night." Yet God did not lead them the direct way through "the land of the Philistines, although that was near . . . Lest peradventure the people repent [grow frightened and retreat] when they see war, and they return to Egypt."

THE ESCAPE AND EARLY WANDERINGS (CHAPTERS 14-18). The Israelites had not traveled very far before the Pharaoh changed his mind again. To recapture so many slaves, he sent after them "all the chariots of Egypt. . . ." Seeing their pursuers approaching and fearful of the Red Sea lying before them, the Israelites again complained against Moses. At God's command, Moses stretched forth his hand, the waters parted, and his band "walked upon dry land in the midst of the sea. . . ." When the pursuing Egyptians "went in after them to the midst of the sea," God caused their chariots to lose their wheels; and then Moses stretched forth his hand again, "and the sea returned to his strength . . . and the Lord overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea."

Miriam, the prophetess and sister of Moses and Aaron, celebrated the deliverance by leading the women with timbrels and dances in a song, a single couplet of which (15:21) is regarded by many scholars as dating from the time of the event.

Now began the bitter struggle for survival in a wasteland, and Moses was forced many times to accept counsel and aid from his God in order to keep the people quiet and alive. At Marah, the people found the water so bitter (brackish) they could not drink it, but the Lord showed Moses a tree which, when cast into the water, would make it potable. In the second month of their wanderings the people complained of hunger. God then sent manna, which "was like coriander seed, white; and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey." Each morning for six days, the people gathered the miraculous manna, and on the

sixth day there was always enough for the seventh day, God's ordained day of rest. To complete his promise—that "At even ye shall eat flesh"—God sent quails that "covered the camp." "And the children of Israel did eat manna forty years . . . until they came unto the borders of the land of Canaan."

By the time the people came to Horeb, they were again without water and complaining so bitterly that many favored stoning Moses. God then commanded Moses to smite a rock and a pure spring gushed forth. The first battle of the Israelites in the wilderness was against the Amalekites. The Israelites would win when Moses held up his hand and would lose when it was down. To keep their prophet's hand upright and the battle in their favor, Aaron and Hur set Moses upon a stone and held his hand steady until sunset.

Jethro, priest of Midian and father-in-law to Moses, visited the Israelites and brought Moses' family to him. When he learned how God had delivered the Israelites from Egypt, Jethro acknowledged the superiority of Moses' God over the gods of the Midianites. He also offered Moses wise advice. Noting that much of Moses' time was spent judging the petty disputes of the people, Jethro counseled the appointment of subordinate officers chosen from among the able men. Moses did so, and from that time these men heard the bulk of the disputes and Moses judged only the most difficult quarrels.

MOUNT SINAI, THE TEN COMMANDMENTS (CHAPTERS 19-31). In the third month after the departure from Egypt, the Israelites were camped near Mount Sinai. "And Moses went up unto God," who renewed his promise to Israel: ". . . if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people. . . ." He instructed Moses to gather the people around the mountain, though they were not to "touch the border of it," and promised to speak through Moses to the throng three days hence. On the third day, the mountain "was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire. . . ." Moses ascended the mountain, heard the voice of the Lord, and came down to repeat to the people the Decalogue, or the Ten Commandments (20:2-17). The people trembled at their proximity to God, but Moses calmed them and returned to the peak to receive further divine instructions. These regulations—the Covenant Code (20:22-23:19)—represent to many authorities the oldest set of laws in the Old

Testament. Included is the oft-quoted: "And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life, Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, Burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe" (21:23-25).

After he had told the people the words of the Lord, Moses with seventy of the elders, including Aaron, ascended the mountain and saw God with his feet upon "a paved work of a sapphire stone." "And upon the nobles of the children of Israel he laid not his hand: also they saw God, and did eat and drink." Moses then ascended the mountain once more, leaving Aaron and Hur in command of the people. This time he remained forty days and received elaborate instructions for building the sanctuary of the Lord, for setting up the line of Aaron in the priesthood, and for the manner of priestly dress and consecration. "And [God] gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God."

THE GOLDEN CALF (CHAPTER 32). After Moses had been some time on the mountain, the people began to murmur. In response to their pleas, Aaron collected their golden earrings, melted them, and with a graving tool fashioned a calf of gold, which the people accepted as "thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." Before it Aaron erected an altar, and the next day the people burned sacrifices: ". . . and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play."

The Lord, who had observed what was going on, told Moses that he had had enough of such "a stiffnecked people" and declared he would destroy them, making the line of Moses into a great nation in their stead. Moses pleaded for his people, reminding God of his covenant with Abraham, until "the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people."

Carrying the two tables of stone on which God had written, Moses descended the mountain and found his people dancing in worship of the calf. So angry was Moses that he broke the divine tables; and he burned the calf to a powder which he mixed with water and made the children of Israel drink. When only the sons of Levi joined him on the side of the Lord, Moses told the Levites to slay the others, "and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men." The next day Moses returned to the mountain top to atone for his erring people. The Lord promised to blot out from his book only "Whosoever hath sinned against me" and to continue to lead the chosen people in their journey.



THE BUILDING OF THE TABERNACLE (CHAPTERS 33-40). Chapter 33 contains two passages very difficult to reconcile. In the first passage Moses went into the Tabernacle, the cloudy pillar descended thereon, "And the Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend." In the second, Moses asked God to show his glory, but was told (33:20) "Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live." Moses was then hidden in a cleft of the rock, and God said, "[I] will cover thee with my hand while I pass by: And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts; but my face shall not be seen."

Moses then hewed two tables of stone "like unto the first," carried them to the mountain, and received the Ten Commandments, in what most authorities believe to be the more primitive account of the receiving of the law. Upon his descent this time, Moses frightened the Israelites because "the skin of his face shone" after being so near the Deity. The sanctuary of the Lord was then built, and the book concludes with the carrying of the Ark into the Tabernacle and the first service of worship. The Lord himself came down in a cloud at the consecration. From that time on in their wanderings, the children of Israel journeyed onward only "when the cloud was taken up. . . . But if the cloud were not taken up, then they journeyed not till the day that it was taken up."

## DISCUSSION

When God "said unto Moses, 'I AM THAT I AM,'" the translator is dealing with four Hebrew characters—JHVH or YHVH. As no one is precisely sure what vowel sounds separate the consonants, the Deity in English sometimes becomes JeHoVaH or YaHVeH. Some scholars regard the four consonants as a form of the verb "to be."

Rationalists have several explanations for the various plagues and miracles accomplished as the Lord frees the Jews from Egyptian bondage. The interested student can easily find discussions of these in almost any critical commentary on the Old Testament. *The Dartmouth Bible*, edited by Roy B. Chamberlin and Herman Feldman, is an easily readable source that offers valuable notes at the end of each book. It is available in paperback.

As does Genesis, Exodus gives evidence of early belief in an anthropomorphic God. Like man, God is given to second thoughts

which indicate an erring, ungodlike judgment. He repents of his plan to exterminate the Israelites. (In Genesis, he repented of his decision to create man and drowned out the race except for the family of Noah.) Yet this early view contrasts with the more sophisticated view revealed in the passage in which God declares, "there shall no man see me, and live." Here man is not allowed to look upon his God. However, the Bible is inconsistent in this regard, for a few verses earlier (33:11) we are told that "the Lord spake unto Moses face to face."

Chapter 34:6-7 presents another new concept of God. He is just and stern as he has previously been, but he is, in addition, something of the vision seen from the time of the ethical prophets onward: "The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin. . . ."

## LEVITICUS

### SYNOPSIS: The Book of Laws

Chapters 1-7 deal with laws relating to sacrifice. "This is the law of the burnt offering, of the meat offering, and of the sin offering, and of the trespass offering, and of the consecrations, and of the sacrifice of the peace offerings; Which the Lord commanded Moses in mount Sinai. . . ."

Chapters 8-10 are concerned with the consecration of priests, and include the story of two of Aaron's sons who are consumed by heavenly fire after they offered "strange fire" to their Lord. Chapters 11-16 contain laws relating to uncleanness and purification, and introduce the idea of the "scapegoat." The book reaches its height with Chapters 17-26, the Holiness Code. Chapter 27 is devoted to tithes and offerings.

### DISCUSSION

Leviticus is almost entirely the work of the Priestly writers. With its legalistic language, it is of little interest to the student of the Old Testament as literature; yet the book contains several passages worth considering. Part of 19:18 contains the commandment, "thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," which Jesus referred to as one of the two supreme commandments to mankind.

# NUMBERS

## SYNOPSIS: The Wandering in the Wilderness

The book takes its name from the census—or numbering—that occupies Chapters 1-4 and 26. A more exact title is that from the Hebrew, “In the Wilderness,” for the book describes important incidents that occurred during the forty years the Israelites wandered from Egypt to Palestine and the many rebellions Moses put down with patience and strength.

Twelve spies sent to search out the land of Canaan reported that the promised land “surely . . . floweth with milk and honey,” but with two exceptions—Joshua and Caleb—they counseled against attacking so strongly fortified a land. When the Edomites refused passage across their territory, the Israelites wandered to Mount Hor where Aaron died and was succeeded as high priest by his son Eleazar.

The Israelites won their first battle against the Canaanites at Hormah, and gave evidence that at one time they worshipped a serpent idol. The king of Moab tried to bribe Balaam, a magician, to curse the Israelites, but by a series of miracles, including a rebuke from his ass, Balaam was induced to bless them instead. God told Moses that he would see the Promised Land before his death but could not enter it, as punishment for his disobedience, and nominated Joshua as Moses’ successor.

## DISCUSSION

The book gives us some details of the route of the wanderings of the Israelites in the desert. It also portrays the grandeur of Moses as statesman and prophet in putting down the rebellions of his people. One passage of particular interest (6:24-26) is the benediction familiar to Jew and Christian alike, beginning, “The Lord bless thee and keep thee. . . .”

# DEUTERONOMY

## SYNOPSIS: Moses’ Discourses to the People

The first part consists of three discourses of Moses to the

Israelites near the end of their wanderings in the wilderness. Included in these discourses is the Shema—"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might" (6:4-5). It is the first clear statement of monotheism in the Old Testament. Several chapters are devoted to various laws. Chapters 31-34 deal with Moses' final exhortations to his people, his blessing upon them, the elevation of Joshua as his successor, Moses' death atop Mount Nebo (Pisgah) overlooking the Promised Land, and his burial in an unknown spot.

## DISCUSSION

The book can be dated with some certainty to 621 B.C., when it was "discovered" and made the basis for King Josiah's subsequent reforms. Probably prepared during the suppression of the prophets under the reign of Manasseh (693-639 B.C.), it reformulated much of Jewish law, ascribing the change to Moses. One of the most influential works of the Old Testament, Deuteronomy's importance is evidenced by the fact that Jesus quoted it more than any other book of the Scriptures.

# JOSHUA

## SYNOPSIS: The Conquest of Canaan

THE SIEGE AND FALL OF JERICHO (CHAPTERS 1-6). After Moses' death, Joshua began the conquest of Canaan by sending two spies into the strongly fortified city of Jericho. They lodged with Rahab the harlot, in her house "upon the town wall." Jericho's king heard of the spies' presence and sent men to capture them. Rahab hid the spies under stalks of flax on her roof and told the king's men that the spies had already left the city. The soldiers hastened in pursuit. Rahab then told the spies that she knew Jericho was to fall and asked them to save her and her family when the city fell, in return for her kindness to them. The spies promised to do so and told her to identify herself during the fighting by hanging from her window the same scarlet line with which she would shortly lower them from the wall to safety. They escaped, hid for three days in the mountains until their



pursuers had returned to the city, and then made their way back to Joshua.

When Joshua's army went to cross the flooded Jordan, the Lord dammed the river as soon as the priests bearing the Ark of the Lord waded into it, in a miracle reminiscent of that at the Red Sea. The Israelite host of "about forty thousand" then passed over on dry land and camped long enough to perform a mass circumcision on those males born in the wilderness and to observe the Passover. Now also the manna ceased, and the people began to live off the land. Near Jericho, Joshua met an angel, "captain of the host of the Lord," who commanded him to remove his shoes, for he was standing on holy ground.

Jericho, strongly walled, prepared for siege. At the Lord's command, Joshua marched his troops around the city walls once for each of six days. Seven priests preceded the Ark, blowing trumpets of rams' horns. On the seventh day, the Israelites marched around seven times in the same fashion. After the seventh circumference, the priests blew a long blast on the horns, the people all together shouted "with a great shout," and "the wall fell down flat." The troops then entered and spoiled the city, destroying all life within and taking for the house of the Lord all the treasure. At the end of the siege only Rahab and her family remained unharmed, "and she dwelleth in Israel even unto this day."

THE CAPTURE OF AI (CHAPTERS 7-8). The second city to fall to the Israelites was Ai, but not before the only Hebrew defeat recorded in Joshua. In his first attack, Joshua sent only three thousand men against the city. Badly defeated, these men were chased back; and Joshua and the elders fell down before the Lord to await his counsel. The Lord answered: "Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face?" He then revealed the cause of defeat: one of the Israelites had kept for himself part of the treasure looted from Jericho. The next day, at the Lord's command, Joshua by the use of lots discovered the traitor to be Achan of the tribe of Judah. After confessing he had stolen and hidden a garment as well as gold and silver, Achan with his family and all their goods was taken to the valley of Achor. There the assemblage of "all Israel" publicly stoned and burned them.

The Lord now revealed his plan for the capture of Ai—an ambush. Joshua sent thirty thousand men to lie in ambush at the

north of Ai and five thousand to wait secretly at the west of it. With the remainder of his troops he feigned battle and then retreated, drawing after him all the host of Ai, who foolishly pursued and left their gates open. The ambushed Israelites then entered the city and burned it. The troops of Ai were trapped between the army they were pursuing and the army which had moved into the city, and they were destroyed.

THE GIBEONITES SURRENDER AND TWO ALLIANCES ARE CRUSHED (CHAPTERS 9-12). Thoroughly frightened by the fall of Jericho and Ai, the neighboring Gibeonites decided to sue for peace. Fearing that they would be massacred rather than dealt with gently, they tricked Joshua by dressing as though they had come a long distance and desired to join the Hebrew confederation. Joshua accepted their offer but found after three days that he had accepted accursed neighbors as confederates. Unable to break his oath of peace, Joshua left their cities standing and the inhabitants unharmed. But for their perfidy, he made the Gibeonites "bondmen, and hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God."

When the king of Jerusalem heard that mighty Gibeon had gone over to the Israelites without a struggle, he persuaded four other southern kings to join him in attacking Gibeon. Called to aid the Gibeonite ally, Joshua responded with an immediate and successful attack upon the five kings. In the fight he was aided by the Lord's hailstones, which killed more of the enemy than did Joshua's men. Furthermore, at Joshua's request, "the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies." The five kings hid in a cave, but the Israelites sealed the mouth of the cave with boulders and continued their slaughter. Later, they released the kings and brought them before Joshua, who had them hanged.

Joshua's final struggle was against a northern alliance of many nations. He defeated their armies at the waters of Merom, and, as God had bade him, hamstrung their horses and burned the great city of Hazor which had led the northern confederates. But "as for the cities that stood still in their strength, Israel burned none of them." Chapter 11:18 points out that Joshua "made war a long time with all those kings," a statement that probably approaches fact more than the easy way in which the Canaanites appear to have fallen.

DIVISION OF THE LAND; JOSHUA'S DEATH (CHAPTERS

13-24). Joshua was now old, though there still remained much land to conquer. Joshua was divinely commanded to divide all the land among the nine-and-a-half tribes with an inheritance on the west of Jordan. (Gad, Reuben and half of the tribe of Manasseh had already received their inheritance east of Jordan.) The land was divided by lot. Besides the tribes, special consideration was accorded to Caleb, who was given Hebron for his part in counseling attack when he had been one of the twelve spies; to the setting up of six cities of refuge, where men who had accidentally committed murder might go to escape revenge until they had been properly judged; and to setting up forty-eight cities for the Levites who, as the priests, had no tribal inheritance. Joshua assembled the tribes at Shechem, renewed for them the covenant with God, and then he died.

## DISCUSSION

Formerly a part of the Hexateuch (Six Books), Joshua was placed as the first book of the "Former Prophets" when the Palestinian Jews established the first canon and the present Pentateuch. Most scholars today regard the Book of Judges, which follows, as a more accurate account of the conquest of Canaan by the Israelites, a conquest taking a great deal more time and accomplished despite little more than a loose confederation of the tribes. Joshua they see as a re-editing of tales from the Northern tribes by the Deuteronomist. To this edited version the Priestly school of writers added other material, principally the chapters on the allotment of the land.

Archaeological evidence sustains the fall of Jericho somewhere between 1475 and 1250 B.C. This "fenced city," about the same size as Homer's Troy, had double walls, the outer being about six feet in thickness and the inner about twelve feet. Excavation has verified that these walls fell. Some experts believe that Ai was actually the nearby Bethel, which exploration shows to have been destroyed about the thirteenth century B.C. Joshua's destruction of Hazor has been doubted inasmuch as it was strongly fortified and lay a hundred miles to the north of Joshua's operations. The route would have led through strongly fortified territory not conquered until later. The Book of Judges, which follows, indicates that the conquest of Canaan was far from complete at Joshua's death.

# JUDGES

## SYNOPSIS: The Rule of the Judges

THE DISOBEDIENCE OF THE ISRAELITES; THEIR DELIVERANCE BY EHUD (CHAPTERS 1-3). After Joshua died, the Israelites began to serve other gods, being especially attracted to Baal, a god of any special place, and to Ashtaroth (Astarte), the lewd fertility goddess. In anger the Lord delivered them to the enemy. Perceiving their cries and repentance, the Lord then sent them judges—or deliverers—who freed them from slavery.

For their evil, the Israelites were enslaved by Eglon, king of Moab, for eighteen years. In response to their repentance, the Lord raised up Ehud, a left-handed man, as champion. Ehud carried a present from the Israelites to the "very fat" king, but with the present Ehud carried also a two-edged dagger hidden in his robes. In the king's presence Ehud stated that he had a secret errand, and the king sent away all his followers. When they were alone, Ehud caused Eglon to rise by saying he brought a message from God. The left-handed Ehud then quickly brought forth his dagger—probably while he held out his right hand to show he meant no evil—and killed Eglon. Ehud escaped, summoned the armies of the Israelites, subdued Moab, and "the land had rest fourscore years."

DEBORAH AND BARAK (CHAPTERS 4-5). Again the Israelites were evil, and for twenty years they were oppressed by Jabin, king of Hazor. To defeat Jabin's army with its nine hundred iron chariots, the prophetess Deborah summoned Barak, son of Abinoam, as Israel's champion. At the river Kishon the two armies met, and the river flooded to mire the chariots of Sisera, the Hazorite captain. Sisera escaped on foot and sought refuge in the tent of Jael, wife of Heber the Kenite, for the Kenites were at peace with the Hazorites. Jael received him hospitably, but when he was asleep she drove a tent peg through his temple and killed him. Deborah and Barak then sang of the victory.

GIDEON, THE LESS THAN PERFECT JUDGE (CHAPTERS 6-8). Because of their evil, the Israelites were oppressed by the Midianites for seven years. Then the Lord visited Gideon, who was threshing wheat in secret for fear of the enemy, and told him to save Israel. At the Lord's command, Gideon struck down the nearby altar of Baal, cut down the grove surrounding it, and built an altar to the Lord. He then gathered a host to fight the



Midianites; but to show his power, God told Gideon to fight using only the three hundred men who, out of ten thousand brought to the river to drink, lapped the water like dogs. With his small group Gideon came to the enemy who "lay along in the valley like grasshoppers for multitude." At the beginning of the middle watch, his men—divided into three groups and armed only with trumpets, empty pitchers, and lamps within the pitchers—made a great noise which led the enemy to suspect a massive ambush. They panicked, began to kill one another in their confusion, and fled. The Ephraimites protested that they had not been invited to send troops to assist in the victory, but Gideon spoke soft words and appeased them.

Gideon was appointed judge. However, he fell victim to the very evil which he had combated to begin his career. He gathered golden ornaments, melted them to make an idol (an ephod), and all Israel worshiped it to the shame of both the state and Gideon's line.

ABIMELECH, THE FIRST KING OF ISRAEL (CHAPTER 9). Gideon had seventy sons. The most ambitious was Abimelech, who persuaded his mother's relatives, the Shechemites, to help him become king. Convinced of their allegiance, he slew all his brothers except Jotham, who hid himself. Before he fled to Beer, Jotham climbed Mount Gerizim and spoke to the Shechemites this fable: when the trees sought for a king to rule over them, only the lowly and offensive bramble could be persuaded to take such an odious position. Despite Jotham's speech, which openly compared Abimelech to the bramble and called for fire to devour the fratricide, Abimelech was made king and reigned for three years. Civil war developed, but Abimelech defeated those who started it and won Shechem by setting fire to the tower stronghold. However, in besieging the tower at Thebez, he was struck on the head by a piece of a millstone hurled by a woman. To avoid the shame of being killed by a woman, Abimelech commanded his armor-bearer to slay him.

JEPHTHAH AND HIS DAUGHTER; SHIBBOLETH (CHAPTERS 10-12). Jephthah, the son of a harlot, had been denied his inheritance by the Gileadites because of his birth. In a war with the Ammonites, however, his tribe begged this "mighty man of valor" to lead them. Jephthah would not agree until they promised he might rule if he won for them. In his zeal to win against Ammon, he vowed a solemn oath to sacrifice as a burnt offering the first thing he saw upon his return home. He won, and upon

his return was greeted by his only child, a daughter who "came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances." Unable to break his oath, Jephthah sacrificed her, allowing her only two months "to go up and down upon the mountains" and bewail her virginity.

Jephthah had other sorrows. The Ephraimites complained that they had not been called to join the fighting against Ammon, and Jephthah declared war on them not only because of their complaints but because they insulted the Gileadite name. Chased from west of the Jordan to the passes of the river, the escaping Ephraimites were slaughtered by the Gileadites, who demanded that each man wishing to cross the river first pronounce the word "Shibboleth." Because Ephraimites said this word as "Sibboleth," they were easily detected and forty-two thousand fell as a result.

SAMSON AND THE PHILISTINES (CHAPTERS 13-16). When the Israelites were subject to the Philistines, the barren wife of Manoah was told by an angel that she would conceive a son whose hair should never be cut. This son, Samson, was to "begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines." His great strength was soon manifest, but soon also was his great weakness—a desire for Philistine women. Despite his parents' objections, he would have a woman of Timnath for wife. On the trip to arrange the marriage, Samson with his bare hands slew a lion, and when he returned he found that bees had swarmed in the lion's carcass. He carried home much honey but would not tell where he found it.

Later, at his wedding feast in Timnath, he wagered the Philistines that within seven days they could not solve his riddle: "Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness." The Philistines accepted the wager and then persuaded Samson's wife to gain the secret from him by bedeviling him with her tears. When the Philistines answered Samson's riddle, he knew what had happened and answered: "If ye had not plowed with my heifer, ye had not found out my riddle." Then in his anger he slew thirty of the people of Ashkelon and regained in spoil what he had lost in his wager. However, when he went to claim his bride, he learned that she had been given as wife to a former friend. Infuriated when a second attempt to see his wife failed, Samson caught three hundred foxes, tied the tails of each two together, put firebrands in the knotted tails, and set the animals loose to burn the Philistine grain fields ready for

harvest. In revenge, the Philistines burned Samson's wife and her father.

The Philistines then made war against Judah, and to escape pillage the men of Judah sought Samson and found him hiding. They bound him with strong rope and turned him over to the Philistines. With little effort Samson burst his bonds, picked up the jawbone of an ass lying nearby, and slew a thousand men with it, celebrating his deed with the composition of a couplet. The emboldened Samson next went to the Philistine stronghold of Gaza, and in this city he was apparently trapped while he visited a harlot. He escaped by arising at midnight, going to the closed gate of the city, and carrying both the gate and its two posts away with him.

Samson's final Philistine love was the perfidious Delilah, whom the lords of the Philistines persuaded to gain the secret of Samson's strength. Samson told her three lies—first, that his strength could be conquered by binding him with seven green withs; second, that he must be bound by new, unused ropes; and third, that his hair must be woven into seven locks. Even though after each lie Delilah turned him over to Philistine strongmen whom he then subdued, Samson finally told her that his strength lay in his uncut hair. Delilah cut his hair while he slept and turned him over to the enemy. They took him in his newly shorn weakness, blinded him, and set him to grinding in the prison at Gaza. There Samson's hair began to grow again.

On the festival of their god Dagon, the Philistines sent for Samson so that they might make sport of him in their god's temple. A lad led Samson into the temple, which was so crowded with the Philistines that "about three thousand" were watching from the roof. Asked to be placed between the middle pillars supporting the temple, Samson prayed that his strength might return for a final time. It did, Samson dislodged the pillars, and he destroyed not only himself but all the people come to make sport of him. "So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life."

THE TRIBE OF DAN; CIVIL WAR WITH THE TRIBE OF BENJAMIN (CHAPTERS 17-21). The tribe of Dan had no inherited territory in which to live and sent out spies to seek a place to settle. The Danites conquered the city of Laish, renamed the city Dan, and set up in it a graven image owned by Micah the Ephraimite.

A Levite of Ephraim was returning to his home from Bethlehem with his concubine. The two were received hospitably by an old man in the Benjamite city of Gibeah; but other men of the city demanded the concubine and so abused her that in the morning she was found dead. The Levite carried the body home, cut it into twelve pieces, and sent a piece to each tribe as a call for assembly and war against the offending Benjamites.

The first two days of war went badly for the Israelites, but on the third day they resorted to the ambush strategy that had taken Ai (Joshua 8). The Benjamites were defeated, were chased into the wilderness, and were told that the men of Israel henceforth would "not any of us give his daughter unto Benjamin to wife." The Israelites later regretted their oath, for it would mean the eventual disappearance of the tribe of Benjamin. Since the tribe of Gilead had not joined in the assembly, the Israelites attacked that tribe and seized four hundred maidens not bound by their oath. These they gave to the Benjamites as wives, and they also counseled the men to seize for themselves wives from the maids at the festival at Shiloh. To gain wives this way would not violate the oath, for the tribes had sworn only not to *give* their daughters to the Benjamites. The Benjamites thus gained enough women to continue their tribe, and rebuilt their cities and dwelt in them. "In those days . . . every man did that which was right in his own eyes."

## DISCUSSION

Historically, Judges covers the period between the death of Joshua and the greatest of the judges, Samuel. Just how long this time was is questionable, but the book depicts the Israelites at the death of Joshua as being far from the sole rulers of Canaan and not even a unified group of tribes. Most scholars accept Judges as a more trustworthy portrayal of history than Joshua. It tells of a time when early tribal heroes gained fame by great victories. The Deuteronomist added to these hero tales the frame described in 2:11-19: the people began to worship other gods, in anger the Lord subjected them to the enemy, and then perceiving their repentance the Lord sent them judges as deliverers. This formula preaches that goodness will be rewarded by material prosperity and evil will be punished by suffering; it also preaches that evil can be atoned by repentance and shows God as infinitely forgiving. Later editors appear to have added an opening section



and Chapters 17-21.

The Song of Deborah in Chapter 5 is the oldest long piece in the Bible and is considered one of the finest pieces of world literature. It is notable not only for its climactic dramatic structure but for the light it throws on the looseness of the Israelite confederation; some tribes are not mentioned and several refuse to fight for Barak. Verse 24—"Blessed above women shall Jael . . . be"—has an interesting echo in the New Testament greeting to the Virgin Mary.

Jotham's fable of the trees (9:8-15) is an ancient fragment and one of two fables in the Bible (the other concerns a talking thistle in II Kings 14:9). The fable, in which the inanimate object or animal talks, should not be confused with the parable, which appears many times in both Testaments. The parable does not use talking objects and makes its point without the humor often associated with fables.

The Philistines, who became the principal enemy of the Israelites, are thought to have come from Minoan Crete, driven from there by Achaean Greeks in the Age of Heroes. Apparently they came into Palestine about the same time as the Israelites, and they seem to have been given preferential treatment by Egypt, which claimed the territory as a province. A commercial and non-Semitic people, they maintained five strong cities near the coast and successfully cut off Israel's access to the Mediterranean seaports until David defeated them. Today, a "Philistine" is someone opposed to culture and art; ironically, the historical Philistines' culture, except for religion, is thought to have been considerably higher than that of their neighbors.

# I SAMUEL

## SYNOPSIS: The Establishment of the Monarchy

THE LIFE AND WORK OF SAMUEL (CHAPTERS 1-8). Samuel was the son of Elkanah and his previously barren wife, Hannah. In gratitude for being granted a son, Hannah consecrated Samuel to God's service and brought him to Shiloh to the prophet Eli, who had predicted an end to her barrenness. Eli's sons, who might be expected to carry on his work, were disappointing him by following pagan practices. In a vision

Samuel was told by God that the iniquitous sons of Eli would be destroyed. When Samuel repeated the vision to Eli, the old seer proclaimed the young man to be a prophet of the Lord. Samuel's vision came true during a battle with the Philistines. Eli's sons brought the Ark of the Covenant into the battle, but its power failed them. The Israelites were defeated, the Ark was captured by the Philistines, and Eli's sons were slain. Hearing of the loss of the Ark, Eli fell, broke his neck, and died. However, the Ark proved an embarrassment to the Philistines, for wherever it was placed it demonstrated its power by bringing its captors bad luck. After seven months the Philistines were glad to return it with a tribute of gold.

Samuel called on the people to put away their strange gods, and under his guidance the Israelites defeated the Philistines. "And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life." In his old age Samuel made his sons judges, but they disappointed him by taking bribes and perverting judgment. The people therefore came to Samuel clamoring for "a king to judge us like all the nations." Samuel opposed the idea and predicted "the manner of the king that shall reign over you," picturing a monarch with unlimited power and little sense of his people's welfare. However, the people "refused to obey the voice of Samuel" and finally, at the Lord's command, Samuel promised to anoint a king.

THE CHOICE OF SAUL AS KING (CHAPTERS 9-15). Chosen as king was Saul, of the tribe of Benjamin, who "from his shoulders and upward . . . was higher than any of the people." Saul first came to Samuel while searching for his father's lost asses; and as soon as Saul appeared, the Lord pointed him out to Samuel as the proper king. Though Saul protested his unworthiness, Samuel honored him at a feast, anointed him, predicted that he would prophesy, and then sent him on his way. Coming upon a band of wandering prophets, Saul joined them and did prophesy, begetting a proverb, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

Samuel formally chose Saul as king by lot in a solemn assembly at Mizpeh. Once more the young king showed his humility by hiding, but he was found and brought forward to be named. When the Ammonites made war against the Gileadites, Saul gathered an army and defeated the Ammonites so severely "that two of them were not left together." His kingship was then renewed in a ceremony at Gilgal.

In the land around Michmash occupied by the Philistines, the Israelites were forced to "hide themselves in caves, and in thickets, and in rocks, and in high places, and in pits." Preparing to do battle with the Philistines, Saul waited seven days for Samuel to appear and offer the burnt sacrifice. Impatient, Saul offered it himself in his first disobedience and incurred the wrath of Samuel who came just at the end of the offering. While the two armies lay encamped in sight of each other, Saul's son Jonathan raided the Philistine camp and slew about twenty of the enemy. In the ensuing battle the Israelites were victorious.

The day could have been an evil one. Saul had commanded his people to eat nothing that day. Jonathan, in ignorance of the command, had found honey on the ground and eaten of it. Furthermore, after defeating the Philistines, the hungry Israelites had eaten the cattle they had taken without observing the dietary laws. When Saul sought counsel from the Lord, the Lord did not reply. Realizing that his army had sinned, Saul swore to punish the transgressor; though the sin "be in Jonathan my son, he shall surely die." By lot Jonathan was found to be the guilty one, and he confessed eating of the honey; but the people would not allow Saul to kill Jonathan, "for he hath wrought with God this day."

Samuel now came again to Saul and ordered him to attack the Amalekites. Saul defeated Amalek, but spared its king Agag, as well as the best of the cattle. Samuel knew that Saul had disobeyed when the "word of the Lord" came to him saying, "It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king." Samuel met Saul, forced him to admit what he had kept, and announced that "the Lord hath rejected thee from being king over Israel." Samuel then ordered Agag brought before him, and even though the captive pleaded, "Surely the bitterness of death is past," Samuel "hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord in Gilgal." Then he left Saul for good.

DAVID AT SAUL'S COURT (CHAPTERS 16-20). At the Lord's command Samuel went to the tribe of Judah and in Bethlehem came to the house of Jesse. He found the seven oldest sons of Jesse wanting and finally had the man bring forth David, who "was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to." Samuel anointed the young man, "and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward." Meanwhile, an evil spirit had come upon Saul, and his servants

sought a harp-player to dispel the spirit. David was recommended, came to court, and won favor both as harp-player and as Saul's armor-bearer.

The Philistines now attacked in Judah, bringing with them a giant, Goliath, the mere sight of whom terrified the Israelites. Goliath sought a man to meet him in single combat, but none was forthcoming. David, who was bringing food to his brothers in Saul's army, happened into camp at this embarrassing time for his people and offered to meet Goliath, giving as evidence of his prowess the fact that he had slain a bear and a lion without weapons. He disdained armor, choosing only his shepherd's staff and sling and "five smooth stones out of the brook." He killed the giant with a stone slung with such strength that it "sunk into his forehead." With Goliath's own sword he cut off the giant's head, and the Philistines fled.

Now a respected member of the court, David became friends with Jonathan, but Saul became envious of him when the people shouted: "Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands." Saul offered David his daughter Michal as wife in return for a bounty of a hundred Philistine foreskins, hoping David would die gaining the trophies; David returned with two hundred and wed Michal. Then Saul tried to pin David with his javelin, but David escaped. Saul also sought to kill Jonathan because of his friendship for David, and Jonathan warned David to flee into exile.

DAVID AS FUGITIVE FROM SAUL (CHAPTERS 21-26). On his flight David sought food and weapons of Ahimelech, priest at Nob. He was given hallowed bread and armed with the sword of Goliath, kept by the priest as a trophy. The event was witnessed by Doeg the Edomite, who reported it to Saul, and in revenge, Saul ordered Doeg to slay eighty-five priests. The city of Nob was put to the sword and only one son of Ahimelech, Abiathar, escaped to follow David.

David now gathered to himself a band of fighters, and they drove off the Philistines from the city of Keilah. Not trusting the inhabitants, David consulted the Lord through Abiathar and learned that the people of Keilah were about to turn him over to Saul. With his six hundred men David eluded capture by going into the wilderness and finally found some safety at Engedi. There Saul also sought him, but the Lord was with David. One night, Saul slept in the cave hiding David and his



followers, and David cut off part of the king's robe as he slept. In the morning, from a safe distance David showed Saul the piece of his robe. Realizing that his life had been spared, Saul then begged David's forgiveness, asked him to swear that he would not destroy Saul's line should he ever become king, and ceased to pursue David.

David now moved into Paran, where he sought provisions from Nabal, a wealthy man. His messengers were rudely turned back and David would have attacked Nabal; but Abigail, Nabal's wife, prepared provisions and carried them to David herself, thus finding favor in his sight. The next morning when she told Nabal what she had done, he sickened and ten days later he died. Shortly after, David took Abigail to wife and about the same time he married Ahinoam. Michal, David's first wife, had been given by Saul to another man, Phalti.

Once again David had an opportunity to kill Saul but spared his life. This time Saul confessed that he had sinned and asked David to return to him, but David did not do so.

THE DEATH OF SAUL (CHAPTERS 27-31). Determined to fight Saul no longer, David swore fealty to Achish, king of Gath in Philistia. In return for his loyalty he was given the city of Ziklag, where he lived a year and four months. His test of loyalty came when he was requested to fight with the Philistine confederation against Israel, but he was saved embarrassment when the Philistine kings, except Achish, refused to have him for fear he would turn against them. While the Philistines were attacking Saul, David returned to Ziklag and found his city razed by marauding Amalekites. He pursued them and was able to recapture all that had been taken, including his two wives.

While the Philistines prepared to war against him, Saul found himself deserted by the Lord, who "answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets." Though he had banned from the land those with "a familiar spirit," Saul now sought such a one and found her in the Witch of Endor. With some reluctance, she summoned forth the ghost of Samuel, long dead. He foretold Saul's defeat and said that "tomorrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me."

The prophecy came true the next day. The Philistines slew Saul's sons, including Jonathan. They wounded Saul, who begged his armor-bearer to slay him lest he be made captive and exhibited in triumph. When the bearer refused, Saul fell on his

own sword. His body and the bodies of his sons were taken to Philistia and exhibited, but the Israelites retrieved them in a raid and buried them properly.

## DISCUSSION

Despite the familiarity of much in these books of Samuel—the stories of Samuel, Saul, and David—the reader may find the text confusing, for two writers or groups of writers worked on the books and later editors made further changes. The part of the work roughly from I Samuel 4 to II Samuel 24, and on to Solomon's accession to the throne (I Kings 1-2), is thought to be the earliest document and to have been written close to the period of David's kingship (1000-961 B.C.). On the whole favorable to David, this section nonetheless presents his weaknesses as well as his strengths and gives a moving account that is believed to reflect the history of the period with some accuracy. Another part—including the first three chapters, considerable material interpolated in the earlier document, and the story of Samuel's ghost—is probably the work of the Deuteronomist and seeks to interpret facts rather than to relate them.

The earlier work presents the idea of a king as good, promoting unity, strength, and security. The later work, written after the existence of a long line of kings, most of them disappointing, reflects disillusionment with the idea of a king. Held above kingship is the idea of goodness and obedience to the Lord. These two viewpoints, along with other editing, result in manifest contradictions within the books: for example, the idea of an omniscient God repenting his act of making Saul king; Saul's inquiry as to the identity of the youth who slew Goliath, even though David had been playing the harp for him for some time; and the two versions of Saul's death.

The synopses of the different incidents have omitted contradictions, but the student should read the text carefully for complete understanding. What should emerge is a picture of an ethnic group ruled haphazardly but as well as possible by the greatest of the judges, Samuel, in the tenth century B.C.; followed by a kingship (Saul, 1020-1000 B.C.) in which prophet and king vied for the right to control and in which Saul's evil spirit continually contended with his finer one; and ending with David's kingship and power as the Israelites reached their brief bloom of nationalistic growth before their kings degenerated into

intriguing Oriental monarchs little different from those surrounding their abbreviated territory.

Foreshadowing the eventual split between the Northern Kingdom and the Southern one, Saul was of the Northern tribe of Benjamin and commanded more allegiance there than in Judah, from which Southern tribe David was descended.

Saul's mission to Samuel throws some light on the nature of the earlier prophets in Israel: Saul brought money in payment for a divination of the whereabouts of what had been lost. Such uses of the prophet corresponded with the divination by dream, the use of lots to determine guilt and worthiness, and the use of the yet unexplained Urim and Thummim. Saul's meeting with the band of prophets shows them to be men who in their trances indulged in strange behavior. Later, the ethical prophets would prove far more dignified, earning respect for their intelligence and good counsel. Samuel already begins to show the traits of the ethical prophet.

## II SAMUEL

### SYNOPSIS: The Reign of David

THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE KINGDOM UNDER DAVID (CHAPTERS 1-12). The Amalekite who came to inform David of Saul's death paid for his pains with his life. David then mourned and composed an elegy to Saul and Jonathan, "The Song of the Bow" (1:19-27). His mourning completed, David went to Hebron and was made King of Judah.

Saul's captain, Abner, had made Saul's son Ish-bosheth king of Israel, and a civil war began between Israel and Judah. Joab, David's captain, began the war at the pool of Gibeon. In the battle, which Judah won, Joab's brother Asahel was slain by Abner. Further battles continued to weaken the North. Finally, after an argument with Ish-bosheth, Abner made a pact with David to bring all Israel under his power. David agreed, provided he might have back Michal, Saul's daughter, as his wife. David's captain Joab disapproved of the pact and murdered Abner. Though David publicly mourned Abner's death, he did not punish Joab. Meanwhile, two of David's warriors found Israel's king Ish-bosheth, "who lay on a bed at noon," slew him,

and brought his head to David. Like the Amalekite who brought news of Saul's death, these men were slain, even though their act made it possible for David to reign over a united kingdom.

A military victory over the Jebusites gave Jerusalem to David. The city had been thought all but unconquerable, and its situation on a high ridge between the Northern and Southern tribes made it most acceptable as the capital of the new kingdom. The Northern tribes submitted to David, who at thirty-seven began his thirty-three-year reign. One of his first acts was to bring into the new capital the Ark of the Covenant from Gibeah. The trip occasioned two mishaps. Uzzah, who saw the Ark shake on the wagon carrying it, put forth his hand to steady it and was struck dead by the Lord for presuming to think that so holy a thing needed any help from man. And David, who led the procession into Jerusalem with "leaping and dancing," incurred the sarcasm of Michal, who compared his antics to those of the "vain fellows." For her impertinence, she was put aside and "had no child unto the day of her death."

By a series of military victories, David and Joab now brought the kingdom to its greatest extent, claiming tribute of the nations from the Euphrates to the Red Sea and from the Mediterranean to the desert of Arabia. Only the Phoenicians, David's allies, appear to have escaped his power. The king found time and mercy, however, to remember Jonathan's son Mephibosheth, "lame on both his feet." Though this man might be expected to try to avenge his grandfather and was therefore potentially dangerous, David succored him, returned to him Saul's lands, and made him a permanent guest at the king's table.

Less honorable were David's actions toward Uriah the Hittite, a faithful soldier who had a beautiful wife Bath-sheba. David first saw Bath-sheba as he was walking on the roof of his house. He had her brought to him and she conceived a child. David then had Uriah sent home from battle so that he might think he had sired the child. Uriah came at his king's summons, but because he had vowed not to accept the pleasures of peacetime while in active service, he refused to visit his wife. David finally sent him back to camp with a letter to Joab, his captain, commanding that Uriah be put in the front lines so that he might be killed in battle. Uriah was killed and David then was able to marry Bath-sheba and make the yet unborn child legal issue.

His scheme did not go unnoticed by Nathan the prophet,



who recited a parable of a rich man with many flocks who took the single ewe lamb of a poor man as food for a guest. Then Nathan pointed out that it was David who had behaved like the rich man. For this sin, Nathan said, David would suffer rebellion within his house, and the yet unborn child would die. Though David repented, the prophecy began to work when the child did die. Bath-sheba's second child, however, lived; he was Solomon.

THE REVOLT OF ABSALOM (CHAPTERS 13-19). Trouble soon arose within David's family because of rivalries among his various children. One son, Absalom, had a sister desired by Amnon, her half brother. Feigning illness, Amnon persuaded the girl, Tamar, to wait upon him and then raped her. Two years later, Absalom invited Amnon to a sheepshearing festival, had him murdered, and then fled himself to Geshur.

Joab helped Absalom to return from exile by sending to David a petitioner who pleaded for pardon for an imaginary son whose story was similar to Absalom's. When David learned that the son was but a symbol for Absalom, he permitted his own son to return to Jerusalem, though not to the court. After two years of exile within the city gates, Absalom forced Joab to bring him before his father by burning the captain's fields. Though prince and king were again united, Absalom desired more power and began to subvert his father's rule. He was praised for his beauty, especially for his luxuriant hair which weighed two hundred shekels when he cut it annually. The handsome-haired son began to stand at the city gate, talking craftily to many who entered; thus he "stole the hearts of the men of Israel."

In time Absalom was strong enough to rebel. With his father's permission he made a trip to Hebron, and once there he declared himself king. With him was Ahithophel, David's former adviser. Finally Absalom grew so powerful that David was forced to flee. Among those who mocked David in his flight from Jerusalem were Mephibosheth, Jonathan's lame son he had befriended; and Shimei of Saul's house, who cursed David: "thou bloody man, and thou man of Belial."

Hushai, a counselor loyal to David, was playing the spy in Absalom's court when the usurper came in victory to Jerusalem. He argued against Ahithophel's proper counsel that a force of twelve thousand at once pursue David and attack him, and suggested instead that Absalom later lead a charge personally. When Ahithophel saw his counsel ignored, he gave up hope for the

rebellion's success and hanged himself.

Eventually the troops of father and son met. David cautioned his captains to "deal gently" with his son. The battle took place in a wood so tangled that it "devoured more people . . . than the sword." Among those ensnared was Absalom, whose hair was caught in the boughs of an oak tree as he rode under it. Disregarding his king's command to deal gently, Joab slew the usurper son, cast him into a pit, and had stones piled upon him. David's reaction to the news was a moving lament: "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

David chose the tribe of Judah to escort him back to Jerusalem in triumph. Among those seeking pardon were Shimei and Mephibosheth.

OTHER EVENTS OF DAVID'S REIGN (CHAPTERS 20-24). A Benjamite named Sheba led a rebellion of the Northern tribes, calling them to his side with a stirring poem (20:1) ending with the words "every man to his tents, O Israel." Joab pursued Sheba's army to the city of Abel, in which lived a "wise woman" who bargained with Joab: the life of the city for the head of Sheba. She persuaded the city men to follow her plan, soon tossed to Joab the head of the conspirator, and the rebellion ended. A famine threatening the land was ended by the hanging of seven of Saul's sons. For a census which angered God, David chose three days' pestilence as a punishment for his people; the plague was ended when David confessed his sin and built an altar to the Lord.

## DISCUSSION

David's laments for Saul and Jonathan, for Abner, and for Absalom are believed to have been written by the king himself, giving ample reason for his being called the "sweet psalmist of Israel." The Book of Jasher, mentioned as the source for both "The Song of the Bow" and the short piece in Joshua about the sun's standing still, is a lost collection, presumably of songs.

The figure of Nathan the prophet exemplifies the prophet counselor who will appear from now on. No longer the ruler, like Samuel or Moses—and certainly not the type of dervish with whom Saul prophesied—the new prophet will advise the ruler as well as berate him when he believes it necessary. The prophets are not to be confused with the priests, such as Abiathar, who appear to have been at the king's command.

# I KINGS

## SYNOPSIS: The Glory and Decline of Kingship

THE DEATH OF DAVID AND ACCESSION OF SOLOMON (CHAPTERS 1-2). In David's old age he was brought his final wife, Abishag the Shunammite, who cherished him faithfully. Adonijah, his eldest son, perceiving his father's weakness, then declared himself king and was joined by Joab and Abiathar. To counter their scheme, Nathan the prophet conspired with Bath-sheba to influence David to declare Solomon the proper king. David did so and Solomon was anointed by Nathan and Zadok the high priest. Adonijah was forced to give up his pretensions to the throne; he sought sanctuary at the horns of the altar and was reprieved by Solomon. Before David died, he reminded Solomon not only to walk in the way of the Lord but to settle old debts with Joab and Shimei. After forty years' rule in Judah and the United Kingdom, David died.

Through Bath-sheba, Adonijah begged his half brother for permission to wed Abishag, David's final wife. Incensed because such a marriage would make the people think Adonijah was David's rightful successor, Solomon had the pretender slain. The new king then banished Abiathar, the priest who had supported Adonijah; had Joab pursued to the sanctuary and slain; and, after holding Shimei captive in Jerusalem, had him killed also when he was detected making a forbidden trip to Gath. His enemies destroyed, Solomon began to reign in security.

THE REIGN OF SOLOMON (CHAPTERS 3-11). Solomon's marriage to the Pharaoh's daughter cemented a political alliance with Egypt. In a vision the Lord promised to grant Solomon what he wished: "an understanding heart to judge thy people," and soon Solomon became known for his wisdom. His first judgment concerned two harlots who claimed the same baby. When Solomon said he would cut the baby in two and award each woman an equal part, the true mother begged him not to kill the infant but to give it to the other woman; she then received the child for having shown a true mother's heart.

Solomon now began to build a magnificent Temple, using wood of the cedars of Lebanon and huge stone blocks brought in from great distances. After seven years the Temple was completed with lavish ornamentation, and in it was installed the Ark of the Covenant. For himself Solomon built a house that

took thirteen years to complete. He also formed navies on the Mediterranean and Red Seas, transported the gold of Ophir, worked the mines of Edom, built a smelter at Ezion-geber, and conducted at Megiddo an immense horse-trading center. Among his distinguished visitors was the Queen of Sheba, who brought rich gifts; and in return the king gave to her "all her desire." To him also came many foreign wives, probably a way of holding various alliances, but they proved a snare to him. Because Solomon not only let them worship their own gods but went so far as to erect temples to these gods (II Kings 23:4-14 gives a description of what Solomon at least started), the Lord was angry and promised to take the kingdom from Solomon's son. Solomon lost Damascus and Syria to Hadad in an uprising, and at his death after a forty-year reign, the kingdom was in serious trouble and diminished in size.

Before Solomon's death, Ahijah the prophet came to Jeroboam, whom Solomon had appointed ruler over the house of Joseph. Ahijah took from Jeroboam his new garment, rent it into twelve pieces, and gave ten of them to Jeroboam as a symbol that he was destined to rule the ten Northern tribes. To Solomon's line was to be left only one tribe, Judah, which had already absorbed Simeon. Hearing the news, Solomon sought to kill Jeroboam, but he fled to Egypt and found safety with Pharaoh Shishak.

THE DIVISION OF THE KINGDOM (CHAPTER 12). Upon Solomon's death his son Rehoboam came to Shechem for his coronation. Jeroboam had returned from his exile and, as representative for the Northern tribes, asked that Rehoboam make their life less grievous than it had been under Solomon. Foolishly ignoring the advice of his elders while heeding that of young men, Rehoboam answered: "... I will add to your yoke: my father hath chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions." With much the same farewell that Sheba had earlier used against David—"to your tents, O Israel: now see to thine own house, David"—the ten tribes followed Jeroboam, who became the first Northern king. Jeroboam soon did evil by building two calves of gold and placing one at the northern extremity of the kingdom, in Dan, and the other at the southernmost point in Bethel, to keep his people from wishing to go to Jerusalem in Judah to worship.

THE REIGN OF AHAB; THE PROPHET ELIJAH (CHAPTERS



13-22). Judah's line of kings proceeded in a direct line from Solomon: Rehoboam, Abijam, Asa, Jehoshaphat. Israel's line, however, was torn by dissent. Jeroboam's son Nadab was slain after two years and supplanted by Ahijah's son Baasha. Baasha's son Elah reigned only two years before he was slain, along with all descendants of Baasha, by a captain of his chariots, Zimri, who ruled only seven days. A bloody civil war ended when Omri, an army captain, became king and he moved the capital from Tirzah to Samaria.

Omri's son Ahab ruled after his father's death, and he "did evil in the sight of the Lord above all that were before him." The greatest evil was his marriage to Jezebel, a Zidonian, and their joint attempt to institute Baal worship in Israel. Against this king now came Elijah the Tishbite, of Gilead, who had been told by the Lord that there would be no rain for seven years. During this severe time Elijah at first lived beside a brook and was fed by ravens. When the brook dried up, he lived with a widow, for whom he miraculously extended "an handful of meal . . . and a little oil in a cruse" into rations for "many days." He also brought back to life her son. Finally Elijah went to Obadiah, who had hidden a hundred prophets in caves and fed them after Jezebel had ordered all Israelite prophets to be killed. Obadiah presented the prophet to Ahab, as Elijah commanded.

Elijah then set up a wager. Ahab was to conduct a trial between the gods of Zidon, represented by 450 prophets, and the God of Israel, represented by Elijah, on Mount Carmel in front of an assembly. Elijah allotted to the prophets of Baal a whole day to call down fire to consume a bullock laid upon their altar. Despite their rituals and self-mutilation, they drew no fire and their sacrifice remained unconsumed. At evening, Elijah built his altar, laid on it his bullock, and had the whole drenched three times with water. Elijah then called to the God of Abraham and instantly his sacrifice was consumed, including the altar stones and the water in the trenches. The people acknowledged the true God and delivered the Baal prophets to Elijah, who slew them. Elijah then promised a deluge of rain, and a servant, sent to look toward the sea, on his seventh trip reported the appearance of "a little cloud . . . like a man's hand." Warning Ahab to get home at once before the flood mired his chariot, Elijah ran so fast in his elation that he outran the chariot to the plain.

His elation was short-lived, for Jezebel ordered him slain.

He fled to the southernmost point of Judah, Beersheba, and there lay down in despondency to die. However, the Lord set before him food and water sufficient to carry him within the next forty days to Mount Horeb (Sinai) where Moses had met God. Here, too, Elijah found God, though in no anthropomorphic concept: "And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains . . . ; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice." The voice commanded him to return and to anoint Jehu as king of Israel and Elisha to succeed himself in prophecy. Elijah returned and did as he had been commanded.

Meanwhile, Ahab coveted a vineyard adjacent to his fields but owned by Naboth, who would not sell this "inheritance of my fathers," which he held as a sacred obligation. Perceiving her husband's petulance at being thwarted in his desires, Jezebel hired two men to bear false witness against Naboth as blasphemer, and he was convicted and stoned to death. Ahab's last meeting with Elijah came as the king walked in Naboth's vineyard, now his own. The prophet accosted Ahab, told him the dogs would lick his blood in the place where Naboth had died, foresaw the bloody end of his posterity, and promised that "dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall." In great fear, Ahab humbled himself and averted immediate danger, passing the evil on to his son's time. Ahab was slain in a war waged against Syria by Israel and Judah. Elijah's prophecy came true when Ahab's bloody chariot was washed in the pool of Samaria and the city dogs licked up the blood.

## DISCUSSION

The two Books of Kings follow in part historical records kept from the time Solomon ascended the throne. As such, they record Solomon's magnificence; the split into two kingdoms upon his death; the wars and alliances between the two kingdoms and often also the wars and alliances with Syria, once a part of David's Israel; the fall of the Northern Kingdom to Assyria; the discovery of "the lost book of the law" (Deuteronomy) during Josiah's reign in Judah; and the eventual capitulation of Judah to Babylon, the destruction of the Temple, and the carrying off of the children of Judah to Babylon.

Standing out in the books, though, are not the kings—even the great Solomon is less vividly brought to life than his father—but two prophets, Elijah and Elisha. The prophets' acts and denunciations do more to bring the monarchs to life than do the rulers' own wars and idolatries. Throughout the books the hand of the Deuteronomist is evident. The worth of the kings, for example, is judged by a single standard: whether or not they were faithful to Yahveh. Strong kings who brought obvious prosperity and security—Jeroboam II, for example—are labeled bad because they followed baalim; and weak or bloodthirsty kings are excused by their opposition to all deities but the God of Israel.

## II KINGS

### SYNOPSIS: The Separate Kingdoms

THE DEATH OF ELIJAH AND THE MIRACLES OF ELISHA (CHAPTERS 1-13). The time came for Elijah's death. Despite the old prophet's protests, Elisha followed him from Gilgal to Bethel, to Jericho, and to the river Jordan, which Elijah divided by smiting it with his mantle. Elisha requested "a double portion" of Elijah's spirit and was told that such power would be his should the younger man "see me when I am taken from thee." Shortly afterward "there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw it. . . ." Elijah's mantle fell upon Elisha. With this mantle, Elisha smote the waters of Jordan, parted them, and was accepted as the rightful successor to Elijah by the sons of the prophets. At Jericho his next miracle was to change the salt water to fresh and redeem much barren land. His miracle on the way to Bethel was less creditable; taunted as a "bald head" by some little children, he cursed them and two she-bears came out of the wood and killed "forty and two children of them."

When the Moabites were fighting the kings of Israel, Edom, and Judah in confederacy, these three kings, finding their armies without water, begged Elisha for help. Though disdaining the kings of Israel and Edom, for the sake of Judah Elisha told the kings to dig ditches around their camp and promised them success against Moab. The next morning the ditches were filled

with water. The sun shone so brightly on the water that the Moabites thought they saw ditches filled with blood, reasoned that the three kings had slain one another in internecine war, rashly came charging into the camp, and were slaughtered.

Elisha effected many other miracles. For a widow of a son of the prophets, he filled empty vessels with oil that she might sell to pay her debts. He cured the barrenness of a Shunammite woman who was kind to him, and when her son died, he brought the boy back to life. He destroyed the poisonous herbs accidentally boiled in the prophets' pottage and saved them from agonizing death. He cured the leprosy of Naaman, captain of the Syrian armies, by having him bathe seven times in the Jordan. In gratitude Naaman swore to follow Elisha's God the rest of his days, and this was payment enough for Elisha. However, Gehazi, Elisha's servant, secretly demanded a payment for his master and kept it for himself. For this sin, which Elisha perceived, Gehazi was punished with Naaman's leprosy.

Elisha then sought to end the line of the wicked Ahab, whose posterity under Joram was still ruling Israel. Through a daughter who had wed a Judean king, Ahab's line also had power in the Southern state. Elisha sent a young prophet to anoint Jehu with oil and command him as the new king to destroy any who remained of Ahab's line. Jehu came to Jezreel, where Joram lay recovering from wounds. Joram was being visited by Ahaziah, the king of Judah and son of Ahab's daughter Athaliah, and Jehu killed both of them. Jehu then went to the house of the aged Jezebel, who painted her face and looked out an upper window. Two or three eunuchs beside her heard Jehu's question, "Who is on my side? Who?" They answered it by throwing their mistress to the stones beneath. "And they went to bury her: but they found no more of her than the skull, and the feet, and the palms of her hands." As Elijah had prophesied, she was eaten by dogs.

THE TEN TRIBES LOST TO ASSYRIA (CHAPTERS 14-17). The dynasties of Israel ran short, violent courses. The line established by Jehu continued through Jehoahaz, Joash, and Jeroboam II. Jeroboam reigned for forty-one years, restored the coast of Israel, and captured Damascus from Syria. His accomplishments, despite his idolatry, led the commentator to write (14:26) that the Lord was merciful to him, "For the Lord saw the affliction of Israel. . . ." His son Zachariah, however, perished in a civil



war that placed two kings, Shallum and Menahem, on the throne in less than a year's time. Menahem paid tribute to the rising power of Assyria and was spared an invasion. His son Pekahiah was killed by Pekah, during whose reign the Assyrian Tiglath-pileser captured many provinces of Israel and carried the inhabitants captive to Assyria. Pekah fell in a conspiracy led by Hoshea, final king of Israel. Hoshea conspired with Egypt against Assyria and brought about a three-year siege of Samaria. When Samaria fell, the people of Israel were dispersed throughout Assyria and foreigners were brought in to dwell among those who were left. As the Samaritans, these foreigners would later cause trouble. The ten Northern tribes were no more; "the Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight: there was none left but the tribe of Judah only."

HEZEKIAH AND ISAIAH (CHAPTERS 18-20). With one exception the line of David had continued to govern Judah. The exception was Athaliah, daughter of Ahab and mother of Ahaziah. When Jehu killed her son in his Northern coup, she killed "all the seed royal" except one, whom his sister stole and hid until his mother had ruled for almost seven years. This son, Joash, came to power in a conspiracy led by Jehoiada, who produced the hidden son, then seven years old, and anointed and crowned him in the temple before an assembly. When Athaliah appeared to investigate the commotion, she was killed. (II Kings 11) From Joash (also Jehoash) the line went to Amaziah, Azariah (also Uzziah) a leper, Jotham, and Ahaz. Ahaz sent treasure to the Assyrian Tiglath-pileser, met him in Damascus to make peace, and put off for a time an Assyrian invasion.

Ahaz' son Hezekiah finally had to confront the Assyrians. When Sennacherib the Assyrian took Judah's fenced cities, Hezekiah used the gold and silver from the Temple to pay the high tribute demanded. The tribute notwithstanding, the Assyrian host came against Jerusalem. Their leader accused the Judeans of being in alliance with "this bruised reed, . . . Egypt" and promised to move the people to a land like their own if they would surrender. Hezekiah sought counsel from the prophet Isaiah, who said that the Lord would defend the city if it stood against the Assyrians. That night "the angel of the Lord went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians" 185,000 of the enemy; Sennacherib returned to Nineveh, where two of his sons slew him as he prayed.

Hezekiah's life was threatened by illness, but Isaiah, who had prophesied his death, returned to say that God had heard the king's prayer and granted him fifteen more years. As a sign of the Lord's intentions, Isaiah showed his king that the shadow of the sun had gone back ten degrees. In his later age Hezekiah entertained visitors from the newly powerful Babylon and foolishly showed them his remaining treasures. Isaiah scolded him, pointing out he had roused the envy of the Babylonians, who would return, take his treasure, and make his male issue "eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon."

JOSIAH'S REFORMS AND THE FALL OF JUDAH (CHAPTERS 21-25). Manasseh and Amon, two idolatrous kings, followed Hezekiah, but the third, Josiah, was a model ruler. During the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign, Hilkiyah the high priest declared, "I have found the book of the law in the house of the Lord." The leaders were dismayed because the book threatened dire consequences for those who did not follow the laws and rituals. Its threats were verified with the prophetess Huldah. Josiah then instituted thorough reforms according to the newly discovered law and destroyed all the altars of gods other than the God of Israel. Josiah finally fell in battle against the Egyptians at Megiddo.

Egypt now controlled the land, and the Pharaoh replaced Josiah's son Jehoahaz with another son, whose name he changed to Jehoikim. He ruled as a satellite to Egypt, paying extensive tribute. His son Jehoiachin was king when Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, took Jerusalem and carried off into captivity the royal family, all the city's treasures, and the smiths and craftsmen. Zedekiah was set up as a puppet ruler of Judah, and he rebelled against Babylon. Once more Nebuchadnezzar came to besiege Jerusalem, and after holding out for over a year, the city fell. Zedekiah was captured, saw his sons put to death before his eyes, and was then himself blinded and taken to Babylon. The city, including the Temple and palace, was sacked and burned, the walls were torn down, and all the people were deported to Babylon except "the poor of the land" who stayed on as "vinedressers and husbandmen."

## DISCUSSION

The reader must not confuse Syria, formerly part of David's kingdom, with Assyria, the mighty power which arose to the

northeast. The Syrians, or Aramaeans, were Semites and in coalition with Israel held off the Assyrians for a short time. Damascus fell to Assyria in 733 B.C. and suffered the same dispersion as Samaria, which fell in 721 B.C.

In 16:6 is the first mention of "Jews" in the Bible. The word properly distinguishes the Judeans, the single tribe to survive the hazards of history. The word is common in post-Exilic and New Testament writings.

The kingdoms of Israel and Judah were lost at a time when three nations surrounding them were vying for world domination. The rise of Assyria corresponded with a resurgence of imperialism in Egypt. Assyrian power was crushed by Babylon, which then rivaled Egypt and fought for control of the world. Shortly afterward, Persia ended Babylonian rule forever. In such a power struggle the Jews were helpless pawns.

## I AND II CHRONICLES

### **SYNOPSIS: Genealogies and History**

I Chronicles traces genealogies from Adam to King David and relates the events of David's reign. II Chronicles covers the reign of Solomon and the history of the Southern Kingdom to the Babylonian captivity.

### **DISCUSSION**

Believed to be the work of the Priestly school, the two Chronicles mainly restate material already written in Samuel and Kings. This material is edited to make David and Solomon appear saintly. The books omit all reference to the Northern Kingdom. Because of its repeated use of the word in its first nine books of genealogies, I Chronicles has been referred to as the Book of the Begats.

## EZRA AND NEHEMIAH

### **SYNOPSIS: The Rebuilding of Jerusalem**

In the first year after he defeated Babylon, King Cyrus of

Persia permitted the exiled Jews to return to Jerusalem and ordered a Temple built there to "the Lord God of Israel." Many Jews returned, but because of poverty, disinterest, and trouble with the Samaritans to the north, the Temple was not completed for fifteen years. During this time Ezra arrived in the city, empowered by Persia to put into effect Jewish laws. He was shocked by the religious laxity he found and established a set of strict laws designed to preserve what was left of the Jews as a nation. His laws included a ban on mixed marriages, and they caused many who had married non-Jews to "put away their wives."

Nehemiah, cupbearer to King Artaxerxes of Persia, came to Jerusalem on special leave from his court duties so that he might rebuild the wall of the city. When the wall was completed after great difficulties with hostile neighbors, among them the Samaritans again, he left. Upon his return to the city he found conditions lax, enforced strict observance of the laws and, like Ezra, forbade mixed marriages.

## DISCUSSION

Both books were originally part of a larger document that included I and II Chronicles. Scholars still dispute which book came first, but most Bibles list Ezra as first. Both deal with the Jews who returned to Jerusalem after Babylon fell to the Persians in 539 B.C.

# RUTH

## SYNOPSIS: A Story of Loyalty

During a famine in Judah a man of Bethlehem, Elimelech, took his wife Naomi and two sons into Moab, where there was food. Elimelech died, but the widowed Naomi was comforted when her two sons married Moabite wives, Orpah and Ruth. However, her sons died also, and Naomi made plans to return to Bethlehem, where there was again food. Her daughters-in-law wished to accompany her, but she urged them to stay in Moab and take other husbands of their own kind. Orpah reluctantly ceased to follow Naomi, but Ruth would not be persuaded. "Intreat me not to leave thee," she pleaded, "for whither thou goest, I will go; . . . thy people shall be my people, and thy God



my God. . . .”

Upon their arrival in Bethlehem, Ruth became known for her selfless devotion to Naomi. To help feed the mother, Ruth claimed the right of the poor to glean grain overlooked when men were harvesting. By chance she gleaned in a field owned by the prosperous Boaz, kinsman to her father-in-law. He showed her special kindness and ordered his men to drop extra barley just for her. Ruth returned to Naomi with news of Boaz’ favors. Knowing of his kinship to her dead husband, Naomi suggested that Ruth return the same evening and, after the winnowing, approach Boaz as he slept, uncover his feet, and lie down there. Ruth did so, to remind Boaz that by ancient custom the closest kinsman of a childless widow must marry her to preserve the family name and holdings. At midnight Boaz discovered Ruth at his feet and promised to deal fairly with her.

To deal fairly with her, Boaz had first to seek out an even nearer kinsman to Elimelech than he and buy from him the right to Ruth. The kinsman gave up his right to Ruth, and Ruth and Boaz were married. The son of Ruth and Boaz was Obed, father of Jesse, the father of David.

## DISCUSSION

Three books—Ruth, Jonah, and Esther—have been displaced from the order they have in the King James Version because each is a separate story only loosely tied in with the rest of the Bible. In the Authorized Version, Ruth appears after Judges because the story is set in that time, although the Jewish Bible places it among the “five rolls,” which include also Esther, Ecclesiastes, The Song of Solomon, and Lamentations. Many now think it was written shortly after Ezra and Nehemiah had banned mixed marriages. If so, it can be viewed as a protest against the ban. The writer has Ruth, a Moabitess, marry a Jew and strengthens his protest by claiming Ruth and Boaz as great-grandparents of King David himself.

# JONAH

## SYNOPSIS: The Allegory of Jonah

When the word of God came to Jonah commanding him to journey to Nineveh of Assyria to preach against the wickedness

there, Jonah was so reluctant to go that he fled to the nearest port and took ship for Tarshish (probably Tartessus in Spain), thinking that at that distance the provincial God he envisioned would not find him. The Lord sent a storm so terrible that the vessel was about to founder. Jonah was roused from sleep by the captain, who urged him to pray to his God for deliverance. Fearing a transgressor was among them, the sailors cast lots and the lot fell to Jonah. He had already told the men he was fleeing from his God, and he now confessed he was a Hebrew and advised them to throw him overboard. Although the sailors tried to save him by rowing harder, finally in desperation but with pity they cast the prophet into the sea, and the storm ceased.

"Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah," and he remained three days and nights in the fish's belly. He then prayed for help, though the prayer (2:2-9) is almost certainly a later addition inasmuch as it is a thanksgiving for deliverance and Jonah was not yet delivered. The fish then vomited Jonah onto dry land three days' journey from Nineveh, and God once more commanded him to preach to the Assyrians. Jonah went and proclaimed, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown."

His words wrought a miraculous change in the people. Even the king exchanged his robes for sackcloth, the sign of repentance. Because the people reformed, the Lord spared Nineveh. Jonah, furious because of God's mercy to an enemy, prayed that he might die. The Lord merely asked him, "Doest thou well to be angry?" Jonah then went outside the city, built a "booth" to shade himself, and waited for the possible destruction of the city. The Lord had a further lesson for his prophet. He first sent a large plant—"a gourd"—to grow suddenly and shade Jonah from the cruel sun; but the next day God sent "a worm" that killed the shading vine, and once more Jonah prayed to die.

God again asked Jonah if he did well to be angry, and the prophet replied, "I do well to be angry, even unto death." God then pointed out that Jonah had had pity on so transitory a thing as the gourd that grew and perished in two nights, and therefore he should, like God, feel pity for Nineveh, "wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand" (perhaps meaning that in their ignorance of the Lord, they knew not the difference between good and evil).

## DISCUSSION

This book appears among those of the prophets but is quite unlike them. Like Ruth it is a tale, and like Ruth also it is a protest against the extreme nationalism of post-Exilic Judah. The story is deftly told, and Jonah with his petulance before the Lord is superbly characterized. The story, attributed to a prophet mentioned once in II Kings, was written after the Exile and probably later than Ruth. It stresses the idea first voiced by prophets in the eighth century B.C., that God is universal and the lover of all mankind, not just Jews. To establish his point, the writer has God command Jonah to redeem Nineveh, capital of hated Assyria. He also has the foreign sailors quickly accept the God of Israel and shows, in sparing the crew, that God's mercy is to all. God's final rebuke to Jonah and the name of the prophet—which means dove, the symbol of Israel—also suggest that the Jews were to be the missionaries carrying God to all the world.

# ESTHER

## SYNOPSIS: A Story of Revenge

Vashti, queen of Persia, refused to show her beauty at a banquet given by King Ahasuerus, and the king therefore divorced her lest her insolence set a precedent for all Persian wives. Esther, a comely Jewess and ward of Mordecai, was among those the king considered before remarrying, and she became first a concubine and then the queen. Mordecai also pleased the king by uncovering a plot against his life.

Also in the court was Haman, an "Agagite" (probably Amalekite), who wanted Mordecai and the entire Jewish population wiped out. He persuaded the king to order the murder of all Jews on a certain day. Plotting with Mordecai to save the Jews, Esther pleased Haman, who was already erecting a gallows for Mordecai's hanging, by inviting him to a feast.

Meanwhile, when the king was unable to sleep, he commanded that a book of records be read to him and learned from it that Mordecai's kindness in uncovering the plot had never been rewarded. At court he asked Haman what should be the

reward for a man the king favored, and Haman, thinking the man was himself, suggested a procession becoming the king himself. He was greatly angered when he discovered that he had suggested a reward for the Jew Mordecai, and he came to Esther's second banquet in bad spirits.

At the banquet, Esther successfully pleaded for all the Jews, revealed Haman to be a conspirator, and had him hanged on the gallows he had built for Mordecai. Since he could not alter a law of the Medes and the Persians, and thus could not revoke the law Haman had persuaded him to decree, the king commanded his new minister Mordecai to have the Jews defend themselves when attacked under the new law. The Jews did so, received imperial aid, and won. In honor of the occasion, they inaugurated the festival of Purim.

## DISCUSSION

The Book of Esther follows Ezra and Nehemiah in the King James Version and is laid in the court of Persia at the time of Ahasuerus (Xerxes), but most commentators believe it may have been written about 150 B.C., during or just after the persecutions of the Jews by the Syrians. It has no ethical significance and is the only book of the Bible not to have the name of God mentioned a single time. Furthermore, it runs counter to Jewish teachings in advocating revenge, and its central figure is the wife in a mixed marriage but hardly an advocate for such an alliance. One of the last books to be canonized, and then only after bitter debate, Esther is not so much history (Persian records do not mention the event) as a story connected with the festival of Purim, which originated in Persia and spread westward.

# JOB

## SYNOPSIS: The Meaning of Suffering

PROLOGUE—GOD AND SATAN DECIDE TO TEST JOB (CHAPTERS 1-2). In the land of Uz lived the good and God-fearing Job, and his goodness had been amply rewarded by God in wealth and family. Far away, in council "when the sons of



God came to present themselves before the Lord," Satan (more correctly translated "the adversary") challenged God's statement that "there is none like [Job] in the earth, a perfect and an upright man." Satan received permission to test Job by taking from him all he had; Satan felt that in dire misfortune Job would surely curse God. In quick succession Job then heard that he had lost all his substance to raids from Sabeans and Chaldeans and from lightning. Even worse, "a great wind" had destroyed the house in which his seven sons and three daughters were eating and had killed them. Yet "Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly," reciting instead the dirge ending, "the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

In their next encounter, God pointed out to Satan that Job "holdeth fast his integrity," and the adversary maintained that if Job were personally afflicted, he would then curse God. Satan gained permission to do what he wished to Job so long as he spared his life.

Job's affliction was a plague of boils. As he sat "among the ashes," his wife told him to "curse God, and die"; but she was reproved and Job sinned not "with his lips." While he sat suffering, three friends—Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite—came to console him. Out of respect for his great pain they sat silent for seven days waiting for Job to speak first.

PART I—JOB'S CURSE AND THE FIRST CYCLE OF DEBATE (CHAPTERS 3-14). Finally Job cursed, not his God but the day he was born. He desired death, where "small and great are . . . ; and the servant is free from his master."

Eliphaz solicitously began a rebuke, which was the burden of the friends' advice from then on: "who ever perished, being innocent? or where were the righteous cut off?" He reminded Job that "man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward," and pointed out that suffering must be borne patiently: "Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty."

Job admitted that his words had "been rash," but he was unable to find within himself any sin needing correction. Unable to think of such a sin, he asked to be taught, "and I will hold my tongue; . . . cause me to understand wherein I have erred." Remembering the terrors of his restless nights, he asked God, "why has thou set me as a mark against thee . . . ?"

Bildad, the next to argue, assured Job that "God will not cast away a perfect man, neither will he help the evil doers." Bildad's confidence of his own rightness led him to suggest that Job had not been "pure and upright." He was aware, of course; that man can sin without knowing it; but he did not know, as do the writer and the reader, that God himself pronounced Job perfect.

In his reply, Job wondered "how should man be just with God," inasmuch as God cannot be dealt with personally. The Lord "destroyeth the perfect and the wicked"; and, though he refused to esteem himself perfect, Job found no evil within himself. He wished that he might confront God to find cause "wherefore thou contendest with me."

Zophar began to lose patience as he claimed that God knew the manifold sins of Job, and he told the stricken man to "Know therefore that God exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserveth." He warned Job of the futility of even desiring to meet God and admonished him to cease being wicked so that he might again be rewarded.

Tiring of his friends' cant, Job sarcastically began his final speech of this cycle by saying, "No doubt but ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you" and by pointing out that he was not inferior to them in understanding. He called them "forgers of lies" and "physicians of no value." Saying that "I will maintain mine own ways before him," Job concluded with a meditation on the shortness and bitterness of life.

PART II—THE SECOND CYCLE OF THE DEBATE (CHAPTERS 15-21). In this cycle, the three friends could do little more than reiterate their thesis that the wicked man lays up punishment for himself. Eliphaz warned Job that such a man "travaileth with pain all his days."

Job replied that he had heard many such things, and branded the three as "miserable comforters." Once more he deemed his punishment to be "Not for any injustice in mine hands" and insisted "my prayer is pure." He further described his misery, made worse because he "cannot find one wise man" among his friends.

Bildad described the plight of "him that knoweth not God." Like Eliphaz and Zophar, he was describing the wicked in general and no specific evil on Job's part.

Job once more protested his innocence, maintained that

"God hath overthrown me," and again cried out because "there is no judgment" (justice). He noted that his friends had left him, that "My breath is strange to my wife," and that "young children despised me." "My bone cleaveth to my skin and to my flesh, and I am escaped with the skin of my teeth." He ended with a famous passage (19:25-26) beginning, "For I know that my redeemer liveth . . .," which many Christians have taken to refer to the coming of Christ.

Zophar piously reminded Job of "the portion of a wicked man from God, and the heritage appointed unto him. . . ." Job's reply was, "Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power?" He continued by describing vividly the prosperity of the wicked, even of those who "say unto God, Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." Before concluding, he pointed out that death takes the young as well as the old, a further example of the Creator's apparent indifference.

PART III—THE THIRD CYCLE (CHAPTERS 22-31). Eliphaz then directly accosted Job: "Is not thy wickedness great? and thine iniquities infinite?" He suspected that Job might have withheld succor from the weary, the hungry, the fatherless. Job replied that he wished he might find God and plead his case before him. Yet, "Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him." He took some comfort, though, in feeling that suffering brings out the best in a man: "when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold." However, he could not understand why the wicked continue to prosper and gave a long description of their evils.

Bildad pointed out that man can neither "be justified with God" nor innocent, being "born of a woman."

What follows in this cycle has not been satisfactorily explained. Zophar did not speak again, and Job's insistence upon his own innocence (Chapters 26-27) is followed by a beautiful hymn to wisdom, somewhat extraneous but not wholly out of place in the mouth of so exalted a hero. The hymn ends with a proverb: "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding." Once more Job recounted his case, and once more he desired "that the Almighty would answer me." Then, "The words of Job are ended."

THE INTERRUPTION OF ELIHU THE BUZITE (CHAPTERS 32-37). In what most authorities consider a later interpolation, the younger Elihu now began to argue. Elihu explained that he

had refrained from speaking because of his youth, and he now attempted to refute both Job and his friends. For "behold, there was none of you that convinced Job, or that answered his words." As for Job, he "doth . . . open his mouth in vain; he multiplieth words without knowledge." However lame Elihu's arguments, his words in Chapter 37 prepare for the appearance of God in the next chapter.

THE APPEARANCE OF THE LORD AND JOB'S SUBMISSION (38-42:6) "Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind" and demanded, "Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?" He wondered where Job was at the Creation, and by a series of rhetorical questions impressed upon man his complete insignificance in the face of so mighty a Power that can command all nature. His question, "Shall he that contendeth with the Almighty instruct him? he that reproveth God, let him answer it," elicited from Job only the humble reply that he was vile and would speak no further. God's final words showed him master over "behemoth" and "leviathan"—terrible animals that may have been the hippopotamus and the crocodile—and brought Job understanding, in that there is no understanding of God's ways: "now mine eye seeth thee." Job repented in dust and ashes for his presumption in seeking to know the causes of God's ways to man.

THE EPILOGUE (42:7-17). Before departing in the whirlwind, God reproved the three friends (Elihu is not mentioned), "for ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath." He commanded that they sacrifice to him in expiation for their folly—that is, for the cant they offered Job about suffering being the result of man's sins. Job was rewarded: "the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning" until "Job died, being old and full of days."

## DISCUSSION

For centuries, a person who endures suffering without complaint has been described as having "the patience of Job." Job was, however, very much a complainer, though his suffering was indeed sore.

Job's final reward, as well as the difficult Part III which introduces a new character and contains some irrelevant material, persuades many commentators to see in the whole the hand of others than the original writer. Further evidence of tampering



occurs elsewhere, and difficulties with translation of some of the original text present more problems for the interpreter. Some doubt that the writer was a Jew because the place names are not Palestinian and the writer nowhere has Job speak of God's covenant with Abraham; others see such devices as those of an author seeking universality for his message. The date of the book's composition is in doubt, though most authorities believe that it is principally post-Exilic.

## PROVERBS

### SYNOPSIS: Ancient Wisdom

The thirty-one chapters vary from the opening discourse on the worth of wisdom and instruction (Chapters 1-9) to the later short couplets and quatrains which use highly figurative language to construct brief sayings which we today think of as proverbs. Included are all sorts of admonitions—to fools, oppressors, angry men, liars and talebearers, winebibbers, the lustful—and bits of advice such as on the training of a child, the proper way of governing, and on being a virtuous woman (31:10-31).

### DISCUSSION

The book is attributed to King Solomon, who "spake three thousand proverbs" (I Kings 4:32), but the wisdom in this book is probably gathered not only from Israel, but from Edom, Arabia, Egypt, and even Greece. Along with Job and Ecclesiastes, it is part of the "wisdom literature." It is really an anthology, which may have reached its final form no later than 200 B.C. The book is especially rich in allusion and will amply reward its readers.

## ECCLESIASTES

### SYNOPSIS: The Pessimistic Preacher

The book states at once that it is the writing of the son of

David, therefore Solomon, who calls himself the Preacher (in Hebrew, Koheleth). In eleven chapters it considers life very pessimistically, but the twelfth chapter closes with the admonition to remember the Creator. From the opening "Vanity of vanities . . . all is vanity" to the final "Fear God, and keep his commandments. . .," which is so out of tune with the bulk of the rest of the book that it is likely to be an addition, the many sayings have become part of English allusion in a measure far greater than the scant length of the book.

## DISCUSSION

Part of the "five rolls" of the canon, the book is now believed to be largely the work of one man, apparently rich, sophisticated, and cynical, writing around 200 B.C. The tone is so unlike most of the rest of the Bible that it probably would not have been canonized were it not for the authority of Solomon as its alleged author, and a careful reading will surprise those who expect pious utterances from every book of the Bible. Unlike Proverbs it deprecates wisdom—for all is vanity—and 12:12-13 epitomizes this deprecation: ". . . of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh."

# PSALMS

## SYNOPSIS: Religious Poetry

Psalms is a compilation of 150 poems. They reflect all aspects of the Bible—historical events, the wisdom of the prophets and sages, love for Hebrew law, custom and ritual—and show not only an abiding faith and trust in God but also some lapses into doubt and desire for vengeance. Hope and exultancy are in them, but so are despair and abject penitence.

## DISCUSSION

Various attempts have been made to group the 150 poems, but the arrangement used in the Jewish Bible—groups beginning at 1, 43, 73, 90, and 97—was not retained by the Christians. Some see intrinsic groups; for example, Psalms 42-83 are sometimes called the "Elohistic Psalter" because the name for God in these poems is always Elohim rather than Yahveh, giving rise

to a belief that this may once have been a separate collection of the Northern tribes. It is generally agreed that the psalms date from relative antiquity to about two hundred years before Christ.

## THE SONG OF SOLOMON

### SYNOPSIS: Love Poetry

The Song of Solomon (also known as the Song of Songs and the Canticles) is a group of intensely passionate love poems. The Hebrew Bible views it as an allegory symbolic of the love between God and Israel; the Christian, as symbolic of the love between Christ, who compared himself with a bridegroom, and the Church. One ingenious modern solution to its complexity is to see it as a short drama of love between a maiden true to her shepherd lover but brought against her will into the king's harem.

### DISCUSSION

In the Hebrew canon, The Song of Solomon is part of the "five rolls." After intense debate, the book found its way into the canon as much because of its ascription to Solomon as to the affection in which it was generally held. Analysts are likely to date its final form to about 300 B.C. and to see it as purely erotic poetry. It is a rich source of literary allusion; for an example, read 2:11-15 to see how many titles authors have mined for their works in such a short passage.

## LAMENTATIONS

### SYNOPSIS: Laments for Jerusalem

The book consists of five dirges mourning the desolation during and after the capture of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. The first shows the desolation of the catastrophe and may have been written in retrospect; the second and fourth give vivid pictures of the suffering during the siege and appear to have been written close to the time of the event. The third is a lament for personal affliction; and the fifth petitions for deliverance.

## DISCUSSION

The book follows Jeremiah in the Christian Bible, and the prophet receives credit for writing it inasmuch as he was probably present at the Babylonian pillage of Jerusalem. The Hebrew Bible places the five chapters among the books considered least authoritative. The purpose of the dirges may have been to link the fall of the city to the doctrine of merited punishment for disobedience, an idea best illustrated in Chapters 2 and 3. The first four chapters are acrostics, with the first word of each of the twenty-two verses in 1, 2, and 4 beginning with one of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

# AMOS

## SYNOPSIS: Denunciation of Israel's Sins

Chapters 1 and 2 record a skillfully constructed prophecy which Amos delivered to the people gathered for a feast day at the shrine at Bethel. The prophet began with a curse against the people of Syria, predicting their captivity "unto Kir," Assyria. He continued with similar maledictions against Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, then Judah, and finally Israel. The Israelites would suffer "because they sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes."

Chapters 3-6 record a group of denunciations against the Israelites. Their punishment would be dire; of Israel there would remain no more than "the shepherd taketh out of the mouth of the lion," two legs, or a piece of an ear. The shrines at Bethel and Gilgal were abominations, for they encouraged formal worship and sacrifice without true reverence. Therefore, speaking for God, Amos wrote, "I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies." All Amos' God desired was to have "judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream."

In Chapter 5 Amos took an old idea, that of the coming of the "day of the Lord," and gave it a new interpretation. This day had been anticipated in previous writings as the day on which the Lord would punish the nation's enemies and reward his chosen people. Amos saw the day differently: "Woe unto you that



desire the day of the Lord!" He prophesied that it would be a day of the Lord's wrath against Israel, which would be included among the transgressors doomed for horrible punishment. Toward the end of his book, Amos pictured a universal God who rewarded others than the Israelites: "Are ye not as children of the Ethiopians unto me, O children of Israel?" the Lord asked Amos, noting that he delivered the Philistines and Syrians as well as the Israelites. Both ideas were enlarged upon by later prophets.

## DISCUSSION

Amos was unlike many of the prophets who preceded him and refused to be associated with the roving bands of prophets such as those with whom Saul prophesied. "I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was an herdsman, and a gatherer of sycomore fruit," he told the priest Amaziah. His call was direct: "And the Lord took me as I followed the flock, and the Lord said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel."

Amos lived in a period of relative prosperity when Uzziah was king of Judah, the prophet's homeland, and Jeroboam II was king of the Northern tribes. However, the peace was no more than a foreshadowing of trouble to come, for the Assyrians were threatening to invade the Northern Kingdom. Amos foresaw the Assyrian invasion as richly deserved punishment for the iniquities of the Israelites, who were perverting both justice and religion.

# HOSEA

## SYNOPSIS: A Promise of Mercy

Unlike Amos, Hosea tempered his prophecies of doom with words of comfort. His first three chapters compared Israel to Gomer (who may or may not have been Hosea's own erring wife), who forsook her husband and children for various whoredoms. Grieving and angry, God yet forgave Israel, wishing to "allure her . . . into the wilderness" of her more innocent days and there have her call him "Ishi" (husband) instead of "Baali" (Master). The metaphor of wife and husband to refer to Israel

and God was Hosea's unique contribution to the literature of prophecy.

The same spirit of forgiveness permeated the poetry of Hosea. Although Israel did "sacrifice upon the tops of mountains, and burn incense upon the hills," Hosea saw God's forgiveness if Israel would "return unto the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up."

## DISCUSSION

Native to the Northern Kingdom, Hosea wrote only a few years after Amos. However, the span of time was long enough so that conditions had changed. Political stability had gone; the reign of Jeroboam II had been followed by six different kings in a dozen years. Assyria was now a real threat, and Ephraim (Israel) "like a silly dove" was torn between seeking help from Egypt or dealing with Assyria. The people had not heeded the words of Amos; injustice continued and idolatry thrived: "they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind."

# THE FIRST ISAIAH (Chapters 1-39)

## SYNOPSIS: A Messianic Prophecy

Like Amos, Isaiah denounced the luxury of the rich. For them he predicted "instead of a stomacher a girding of sackcloth; and burning instead of beauty." The princes he served were "rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them." He prophesied, "Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; that continue until night, till wine inflame them!" His God rejected "the multitude of your sacrifices: . . . I am full of the burnt offerings . . . I delight not in the blood of bullocks. . . . Your new moons and your appointed feasts . . . are a trouble unto me." All he desired was that his followers "cease to do evil; Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow."

Like Amos, Isaiah had a special call to prophesy, one which

he described in impassioned poetry at the opening of Chapter 6. Like Hosea, he did not predict utter destruction, though he held out hope for only a few, "The remnant [which] shall return . . . unto the mighty God." In Messianic prophecy which held hope for both Jew and Christian, he predicted "The Prince of Peace," to be born from the house of David. This universal God "shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people . . . [and] nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." For the first time, Isaiah predicted an immortality when "Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: . . . the earth shall cast out the dead."

## DISCUSSION

Most scholars hold that there are two identifiable Isaiahs in the sixty-six chapters which comprise the book. The first, who lived in Jerusalem about the same time as Hosea in the north, was more than a prophet. He was a counselor to the Southern kings, a statesman concerned with the welfare of his nation during its invasions from the alliance of Syria and Israel, during the destruction of the Northern Kingdom, and during two invasions by the Assyrians. Legend has it that he was sawed in half for punishment after the death of King Hezekiah. Of the thirty-nine chapters believed to be his, the first twelve are considered to contain the oracles of which he was sole author.

# MICAH

## SYNOPSIS: Plea for Social Justice

Micah was concerned with social injustice among the peasants, whom he spoke of as "my people." He denounced the landowners "who hate the good, and love the evil," who oppressed the peasants and would "chop them in pieces, as for the pot, and as flesh within the caldron," and called for repentance. Micah rejected formalism in sacrifice, asking in rhetorical question, "Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" What God desired was for man "to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God."

## DISCUSSION

A contemporary of First Isaiah, Micah had less influence, perhaps because he lived not in Jerusalem but among the peasants of southern Judah. He used some of Isaiah's imagery; Isaiah's passage predicting that nations "shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks" was included among Micah's oracles also.

# JEREMIAH

## SYNOPSIS: Preservation of Judaism

Jeremiah's writings fall into three parts. Chapters 1-25 contain his preachings, his confessions, and his dark warnings. Chapters 26-45 are a third-person biography believed to have been written by his friend Baruch. The final section, except for a repetitive appendix, is a collection of oracles against foreign nations. In Jeremiah are some of the familiar themes of the prophets. He was preaching to an uninterested audience "which have ears, and hear not." They were unjust but mighty: "waxen fat, they shine: yea, they overpass the deeds of the wicked." And they put their faith in feasts and sacrifices. Speaking for the Lord, Jeremiah told them: "your burnt offerings are not acceptable." He challenged orthodoxy: "For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices."

Jeremiah's contribution to prophetic literature was his "confessions" in Chapters 15-20. Like Job he was introspective, self-analytical. He questioned his fears, his suffering, even the way of the Lord. "Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper?" he wondered. "I have neither lent on usury, nor men have lent to me on usury," he wrote; "yet every one of them doth curse me." Because he realized the perils of the time for children, he refused to accept the comforts of marriage and family. After being put in stocks, he cursed the day he was born and the man who brought the news of his birth to his father. He realized that "the word of the Lord was made a reproach unto me" but could not refuse to utter it, for "his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones."



Jeremiah's heartfelt relationship with God led to two new concepts that later prophets would develop further. For one, he denied the ancient belief that the Temple in Jerusalem was the only place where one might worship God. In the parable of the figs (Chapter 24), he saw two baskets, one containing good figs and the other containing "naughty" ones. The Lord told him that the good figs were the people who had been carried away captive to Babylon. In Chapter 29, Jeremiah addressed a letter to these captives, telling them to increase and to worship, for the Lord had said, "Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you." In stressing that God could be worshiped anywhere, Jeremiah prepared the way for the Jews to preserve their religion through their many exiles.

His second concept stated what earlier prophets had implied, that the covenant between God and Israel was a personal one, between God and man rather than between God and a nation. In Chapter 31 Jeremiah defined his "new covenant," one that makes a man, not his ancestors, responsible for his actions: "In those days [to come] they shall say no more, 'The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge. But every one shall die for his own iniquity.'" And the new covenant will replace formalism of worship with a deeply felt personal worship: "After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts. . . ."

## DISCUSSION

Jeremiah's writings comprise the longest book of prophecy except the whole Isaiah. Like First Isaiah, he counseled the kings of Judah, but Jeremiah lived to see his advice ignored and to witness Judah carried captive to Babylon. By this time Assyria had fallen, but Judah was threatened first by the Scythian hordes from the north and then by mighty Babylon and a resurgent Egypt. Jeremiah counseled subservience to Babylon, whose might he recognized, and cautioned against alliance with Egypt, the weaker power. The final kings of Judah chose Egypt—and lost. The prophet's own life was often in danger as a result of his words. He was put in stocks, imprisoned, and forced to hide. Nothing prevented him from saying what he saw as truth. After the fall of Jerusalem he was forced to go into Egypt, the power he had correctly seen as a futile ally, and there he died.

## ZEPHANIAH, NAHUM, HABAKKUK

### SYNOPSIS: Judgment and Vengeance

Zephaniah's short book may have reflected his anxiety about the Scythians who were spoiling nearby Mesopotamia and may have raided Judah between 630 and 624 B.C. Taking Amos' idea of the "day of the Lord," Zephaniah painted a vivid picture of the horrors to be expected, for "That day is a day of wrath." A Latin rendering of this vision became the famous *Dies Irae*, *Dies Illa* of the Middle Ages.

Nineveh, capital of the Assyrian Empire, fell in 612 B.C. to the Babylonians. This occasion apparently inspired Nahum's exultant verses describing the fall of the city. Chapters 2 and 3 of his book are a moving poem of vengeance, and the next to last sentence has been especially admired: "Thy shepherds slumber, O king of Assyria: thy nobles shall dwell in the dust: thy people is scattered upon the mountains, and no man gathereth them."

The "burden" of Habakkuk reflected the hopelessness of the times, and the prophet questioned the ways of God. "Why dost thou show me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance?" He saw that the Babylonians (Chaldeans) prospered in their iniquity and asked, "wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue . . .?" His answer, in the second chapter, was that man must wait for the appointed end and that "the just shall live by his faith."

### DISCUSSION

The three prophets wrote about the same time as Jeremiah. Though less well known, they shared the troubles of his time.

## EZEKIEL

### SYNOPSIS: Prophet of Restoration

The book is in three principal sections. The first deals with the fall of Jerusalem. Chapters 25-39 contrast the happier lot of

the Jewish "remnant" with that of the foreign nations. The final section, Chapters 40-48, contains a plan for a renewed Jerusalem.

Notable in the lengthy book are the opening chapters with their apocalyptic vision of Ezekiel's call to prophecy. In Chapter 18 Ezekiel expanded Jeremiah's idea that the individual is alone responsible for his guilt: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son." Chapter 34 contains a widely known Messianic prophecy, and Chapter 37 holds the famous allegory of the dry bones, which represent the dead house of Israel: "Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live: And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, . . . and ye shall know that I am the Lord."

## DISCUSSION

This book is commonly held to have reached its present form during the Babylonian captivity. It is believed to have been responsible for keeping the hopes of the Jews alive during their half century of exile.

# THE SECOND ISAIAH (Chapters 40-66)

## SYNOPSIS: Message of Hope

Beginning with Chapter 40, a new tone is apparent in the Book of Isaiah. Scholars believe this to be that of a man they call Second—or Deutero—Isaiah, a man living roughly two centuries after First Isaiah and living among the exiles in Babylon. Second Isaiah announced at once that his was a message not of correction but of hope. He began, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God." Behind the apparent chaos of the times he saw purpose and permanence: "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; but the word of our God shall stand for ever." Isaiah's God alone was responsible for everything: "I make peace, and create evil." Furthermore, "He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth. . . ."

To accomplish his purpose, God has a covenant with "my servant, . . . mine elect." "I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles." There has, after all, been a meaning to Judah's suffering: "Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction." Isaiah enunciated the idea of vicarious suffering and reinterpreted the "chosen people" to mean people chosen divinely so that by their sufferings God might be made manifest to all men. It was this meaning to religion that Isaiah set before the captives yearning for home, tormented by their knowledge that wicked nations were prospering, torn by fears that a people covenanted with God seemed doomed to disappear from the face of the earth. To them Isaiah cried: "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price."

Beginning with Chapter 56 (some say Chapter 59), many scholars see a Third Isaiah, one apparently writing for the exiles returned to Jerusalem and facing the disheartening task of rebuilding a ruined city among hostile neighbors. His message, like that of his master, was one of hope and consolation; and Chapters 60 and 61 best illustrate his spirit and poetry.

## DISCUSSION

The last of the great prophets, Second Isaiah was in many ways the greatest. His poetry is exalted, his vision was immense. Undismayed by the past suffering of his people, he saw a reason for all suffering and hope for all mankind. Second Isaiah felt that Judah was the "suffering servant" by whose example God would be made known to all the "isles of the Gentiles."

# FIVE POST-EXILIC PROPHETS

## SYNOPSIS: The Rebuilding of Jerusalem

HAGGAI appeared to the returned exiles in Jerusalem at a time when, desperately poor and with little hope, they had yet to begin rebuilding the Temple. Reminding them that "he that



earneth wages earneth . . . to put it into a bag with holes," Haggai encouraged the exiles to rebuild God's sanctuary. He helped provide spiritual strength in the bleak days following the return.

ZECHARIAH used a series of apocalyptic visions to show the returned exiles the need of continued regard for the law. He counseled that the new Jerusalem would then have no need for man-made walls: "For I . . . will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her."

JOEL began his short book with a vivid description of a plague of locusts and then called for a strict fast as a repentance so that the plague might be removed. He saw the plague as a prelude to the day of the Lord and, inverting Micah and First Isaiah, advised Judah to "Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruninghooks into spears" before all nations are called "into the valley of Jehoshaphat" for a final reckoning.

OBADIAH, in the shortest book in the Old Testament, expressed the resentment of Judah toward the Edomites, who had helped in the sack of Jerusalem despite their blood ties from the time of Jacob and Esau. The Jews were avenged when Edom itself fell, during the fifth century B.C.

MALACHI, not a proper name but a word meaning "messenger," advocated increased respect for religious observance and for laws concerning tithes, divorce, and the sacrifice of perfect animals. The book reflects the laws imposed by Nehemiah and is notable for the lines: "Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us? why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother. . . .?" The book appears as the final one in the Old Testament.

## DISCUSSION

The writings of the five prophets reflected the economic and political insecurity of the Hebrews after their return to Jerusalem. They urged repentance and obedience to religious law in the time of great stress.

# DANIEL

## SYNOPSIS: The Triumph of God's People

The first six chapters relate the adventures of Daniel and

three friends who were miraculously saved by their God for standing devoutly against pagan demands. After flourishing on a diet of beans and peas (pulse) so that they would not have to eat meat prepared sacrilegiously, Daniel won favor with Nebuchadnezzar by remembering and interpreting a dream the king had forgotten, and his friends survived the peril of a furnace so fiery that it killed those who thrust them into it. As an example for the faithful, these friends suffered and survived even though they refused to bow down to the Babylonian idol. Daniel won further glory by interpreting the handwriting on the wall at King Belshazzar's feast and then, after becoming powerful in Darius' court of Persia, by living unharmed through a night in the lions' den after his enemies had conspired to find him guilty of not worshipping idols.

The last six chapters deal with Daniel's visions. The most commonly cited of these is the one in which he saw four great beasts—representing Babylon, Persia, Greece, and the current oppressors of the Jews. Daniel predicted an end to the current oppression with a series of numbers that have been variously interpreted. He ended the book with an assertion of immortality: "many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt."

## DISCUSSION

Though included among the prophetic writings of the Christian Bible, Daniel is no more prophetic than Jonah, which is similarly included. The Jewish Bible places it more appropriately among the Writings. It is apocalyptic rather than prophetic, the type of writing earlier observed in parts of Isaiah, Ezekiel, Zechariah, and Joel. The word "apocalyptic" is derived from the Greek word for "revelation," and apocalyptic literature is highly figurative, dealing with mystical numbers, strange phrases, fantastic images, and bizarre beasts. It appeared in times of persecution when plain speaking was severely punished, and its symbols were known only to the initiate. The outsider was left with an apparently harmless story or, more often, with a fascinating enigma.

The author of Daniel was writing about 164 B.C., in a time when the Jewish religion was being bitterly persecuted by Antiochus Epiphanes, the same ruler whose attempt to wipe out

Judaism caused the successful revolt of the Maccabees. The writer carried his message to the elect by setting his story in times long past—the Babylonian and Persian empires. He wrote in the person of Daniel, a hero mentioned in Ezekiel as a holy man; but he was undoubtedly a member of the Hasidim (Pious) who refused to yield to the cruel demands of pagan Antiochus. In his apocalypse he brought hope to the oppressed, who saw no way out of their difficulties except through direct intervention by their God. To those who remained pure, the writer of Daniel offered the promise of an eternal Messianic kingdom and the resurrection of some of the dead, the most wicked to be punished and the most pure to live forever in peace.

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